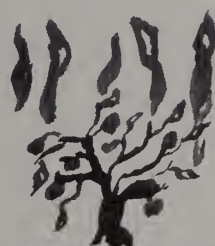


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JOHN MCLEOD CAMPBELL  
The Extent and Nature of the Atonement



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JOHN MCLEOD CAMPBELL  
The Extent and Nature of the Atonement

JAMES C. GOODLOE IV



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## Editor's Preface

Part of the renewed interest in John McLeod Campbell is the drama surrounding his trial for heresy in the Church of Scotland. As one reads over the accounts of the proceedings against Campbell, there remains something elusive which might more charitably account for the relative rapidity of the judgment and for the difficulty he had in getting a serious examination of his views of the atonement. It is as if there had been brewing certain tendencies around which the Church of Scotland was already polarized, so that Campbell's views were heard and read by people preoccupied with an earlier conflict, impatient to put it definitively to rest—whether or not Campbell was really teaching what they were excited about.

Most of what makes him of interest to us today, however, is not even the challenge of presenting his theology as a cohesive whole, but the fact that he has an irrepressible influence to keep theologians and pastors from ignoring the multiplicity with which Scriptures treat the question of the ultimate destiny of all humans before the God known in Christ to be sovereign love. Those who believe there will be a final rejection of some at the end have to contend with charge of eschatological dualism. Those who have no qualms about teaching an unconditional universalism of salvation for all—repentance or no repentance, faith or no faith—have to contend with the seriousness with which Scriptures treat costly grace.

James Goodloe's study sets forth a balanced overview of Campbell's thought and of the contexts in which it emerged and developed. Both sides of each debated issue are so even-handedly presented that the serious reader is thrown back on the need to be as clear as possible about what his or her own position is and the reasons for it—even if that position be the envious but untenable one of apathy. The annotated bibliography that the author provides is arranged chronologically. I would suggest that readers further consult the volume on more of Campbell's theology done by Professor Leann van Dyk.

James Goodloe did his undergraduate work at Davidson College, studied at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, took his doctor's degree at the University of Chicago, and is now the pastor of the Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church, Richmond, Virginia.

David Willis

# I

## Christian Experience and the Extent of the Atonement

John McLeod Campbell (1800–1872), Scottish pastor and theologian, is best known for his heresy trial on the extent of the atonement (1830–1831) and his book on *The Nature of the Atonement* (1856). This study demonstrates that it was Campbell's understanding of Christian experience that led to his theory of the atonement. By first understanding Christian experience as the consciousness of being a child of God, he then conceived the atonement as that which is spiritually and morally necessary to produce this consciousness. In this way, Campbell shifted from forensic to personal and historical categories and accomplished a significant development within the Reformed tradition of Christian theology.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This understanding of Campbell grows from a more comprehensive chronological–developmental study of his work, in its historical setting and significance, than others have attempted. Of the approximately 150 pieces written about Campbell, most are brief and virtually all focus exclusively on either the trial or the book about the atonement. There are only a few dissertations. The earliest of these, by Eugene Garrett Bewkes, “John McLeod Campbell, Theologian: His Theological Development and Trial, and a New Interpretation of His Theory of the Atonement” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1924), published as *Legacy of a Christian Mind: John McLeod Campbell, Eminent Contributor to Theological Thought* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1937) is helpful, though seriously flawed in its critical ability and its reference material. The next, by Douglas A. Shanks, “The Life and Thought of John McLeod Campbell” (Ph.D. dissertation, Glasgow University, 1958) is less helpful, being mostly long quotes and more exposition than analysis. George Milledge Tuttle, “The Place of John McLeod Campbell in British Thought Concerning the Atonement” (Th.D. dissertation, Emmanuel College, Victoria University, Toronto, Canada, 1961) focuses on comparison with other British theologians. Tuttle revised this considerably and published it as *John McLeod Campbell on Christian Atonement: So Rich a Soil* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1986), which gives a good introduction to and defense of Campbell's thought, but, exactly contrary to this study, argues that revelation has priority over Christian experience; see my review in *Church History* (September 1988):391–92. Donald Leonard Faris, in

## CAMPBELL'S EARLY YEARS

Near dawn on Wednesday, 25 May 1831, John McLeod Campbell was deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland. He had been found guilty of teaching universal atonement, universal pardon, and that assurance is of the essence of faith. These were judged to be heresies, opposed to the scriptures and the Westminster Confession of Faith. Campbell, widely regarded as genuinely pious and saintly, was not allowed further ministry in the Church of Scotland.

Six years earlier, on 8 September 1825, Campbell had begun his ministry in the parish of Row (pronounced and sometimes spelled "Rhu"), in Dunbartonshire, on the Gareloch. These years may be divided into the times before and after opposition arose and the time of the trial. The years prior to his ministry were filled with study and preparation.

John McLeod Campbell entered the world with the new century, being born on 4 May 1800. His father, the Reverend Donald Campbell, had recently been appointed minister of Kilninver. The death of his mother in April 1806 led to an unusually close and loving relationship with his father. In November 1811, Campbell began nine years of study at the University of Glasgow. His six years in the "Arts Classes" included prizes in Logic (1815) and Moral Philosophy (1816), while the remaining three years at the Divinity Hall

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"The Nature of Theological Inquiry as Raised by the Conflict of the Teaching of McLeod Campbell and Westminster Theology" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1967), explores the nature of theological inquiry mainly in the context of the trial conflict. Robert Alexander Anderson, in "John McLeod Campbell: The Problem of Authority in Religion" (Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1978), focuses tightly on the issue of authority. James C. Goodloe IV, "John McLeod Campbell, The Atonement, and the Transformation of the Religious Consciousness" (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Chicago, 1987), provides an overall thematic interpretation by tracing Campbell's development chronologically, in his historical setting, and in relationship to the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, nineteenth-century liberal Protestantism, and a conversionist motif in present theology; it is unique among these dissertations by providing a thirty-page annotated bibliography. This study is based on the first two chapters of the dissertation. See also Goodloe, "John McLeod Campbell: Redeeming the Past by Reproducing the Atonement," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 45 (1992):185-208. More recent works include Michael Jinkins, *Atonement and the Character of God: Jonathan Edwards and John McLeod Campbell on the Atonement* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), a comparative study, and *Love Is of the Essence: An Introduction to the Theology of John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1992). Finally, see Leanne Van Dyk, *John McLeod Campbell's Doctrine of the Atonement: A Revision and Expansion of the Reformed Tradition* (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1992; published by Ann Arbor, Michigan: U.M.I. Dissertation Services, 1992), which seeks to explicate Campbell's theory of the atonement and to show Campbell's thematic continuity with John Calvin; and, same, *The Desire of Divine Love: The Atonement Theology of John McLeod Campbell* (New York: P. Lang, 1995).

included prizes for essays on Providence (1819) and on Hebrew Poetry (1820).<sup>2</sup> Campbell elected numerous science courses and appropriated a scientific approach of consulting experience instead of accepting given authorities. Completing the first of his "trials" before the Presbytery of Lorn in 1820, he continued his studies at the Divinity Hall of the University of Edinburgh that fall. On 16 July 1821, he was licensed by the Presbytery of Lorn to preach the gospel. Campbell preached his first sermon in Gaelic, which he did again on occasion, though his extant writings are in English. The remaining years before his ordination afforded him opportunities for preaching, study—though not, as he dreamed, at Oxford, since he could not sign the oath to use the *Book of Common Prayer*—attending lectures, travel, and reading the Scottish philosophers, such as Reid, Stewart, and Brown, along with Butler's *Analogy*.<sup>3</sup>

The Duke of Argyll presented Campbell to the parish of Row in May 1825. He was ordained in September of that year. Campbell brought to the task a strong desire to be a good pastor and to avoid party division within the church. His theology then, giving prominence to the fact of the atonement and the necessity of regeneration while holding to election as a mystery, would not have distinguished him from others. He dedicated himself to preaching from the Bible alone, disdaining the assistance of others' sermons or commentaries. He also determined that all his contact with people would be ministerial in character, limiting conversation to religious discourse. These practices focused his attention on the demand for, and the dearth of, personal religion. This soon led to an emphasis upon the assurance of faith, an encouragement to his hearers to be confident in God's prior love of them. This demand for true faith began to produce results. As his summer parishioners returned home and told what they had heard, the ministers of Glasgow began to take alarm.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> W[illiam] Innes Addison, ed., *Prize Lists of the University of Glasgow from Session 1777–78 to Session 1832–33* (Glasgow: Carter and Pratt, 1902), pp. 165–166, 172–173, 196, 205.

<sup>3</sup> *Memorials of John McLeod Campbell, D.D., Being Selections from His Correspondence*, ed. Donald Campbell, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1877; reprint ed., Louisville, Kentucky: Lost Cause Press, Microfiche A40, 559–563 [vol. 1] and A40, 564–567 [vol. 2], 1976), 1:1–16; John McLeod Campbell, *Reminiscences and Reflections, Referring to His Early Ministry in the Parish of Row, 1825–31*, ed. and "Introductory Narrative" by Donald Campbell (London: Macmillan and Co., 1873; reprint ed., Louisville, Kentucky: Lost Cause Press, Microfiche 24, 646–650, 1977), pp. 1–7.

<sup>4</sup> *Reminiscences*, pp. 9–20; *Memorials*, 1:17–46; cf. Robert Herbert Story, *Memoir of the Life of the Rev. Robert Story, Late Minister of Rosneath, Dunbartonshire* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1862), pp. 143–150; [John] McL[eod] Campbell, *Notes of Sermons*, 3 vols., taken in shorthand, (Paisley: John Vallance, vols. 1 and 2, 1831, vol. 3, 1832), 1, Letter:1–12.



Campbell availed himself of opportunities to speak in Glasgow. When an essay on "The Assurance of Faith" was read at a theological society, he responded. The next week, on Thursday, 20 December 1827, he preached for a charity. Most of the ministers from the society were present. Campbell fully expected that their hearts would be changed, and they just as fully expected the same of him. Both were disappointed. Campbell dated the opposition of his brethren from that occasion, though none had yet formed in Row. During this time of controversy, he examined his teaching on the assurance of faith and found that it had to be grounded in universal atonement and pardon. In this way he shifted focus from the nature of faith to the object of faith. Many thought his teachings meant universalism (i.e., universal salvation) and antinomianism, so that opposition increased. A petition complaining about Campbell went to the Presbytery in December 1828, but it had not been dated and was returned. In May 1829 three or four individuals sent another petition to the Presbytery but were convinced to withdraw it. Summer visitors again spread word about Campbell's teaching and preaching, and denunciations of the "Row Heresy" were heard from the pulpits of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Publishers friendly to Campbell began having his sermons taken down in shorthand and published.<sup>5</sup> He knew that the formulations of his teachings were as disturbing as their content, as were his demands for personal religion. During this period he stated explicitly the central importance of Christian experience and thus implicitly the importance to theology of understanding it: "It is the *life* of Christianity *experimentally to know it*."<sup>6</sup>

On 30 March 1830 legal proceedings against Campbell began with the presentation to the Presbytery of Dumbarton of a memorial signed by twelve of his parishioners. This petition, unlike the previous ones, was accepted. Another petition, signed by eighty parishioners and testifying to their attachment to Campbell, was not received, for reasons not clear. A committee was appointed to meet with Campbell, but he objected that it was unconstitutional and refused to meet with them. The Presbytery sought and received instruction from the General Assembly. The Presbytery then met in Row to hear him on Thursday, 8 July 1830, at which time he preached from Mt.

<sup>5</sup> *Reminiscences*, pp. 20–32; *Memorials*, 1:46–68; *The Whole Proceedings in the Case of the Rev. John McLeod Campbell, Late Minister of Row, Before the Presbytery of Dumbarton, the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland; Including, Besides All the Documents, the Speeches in the Different Church Courts*, taken in shorthand, composite of materials previously published separately (Greenock: R. B. Lusk; Edinburgh: J. Lindsay and Co. and Waugh and Innes; Belfast: Wm. McComb; Dublin: R. M. Tims; London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co. and J. Nisbet, 1831), introduction, pp. i–iv.

<sup>6</sup> *Memorials*, 1:66.

5:1–12. Though not allowed to preach for three hours as he desired, Campbell uttered two statements found obnoxious and intolerable, that God loves every child of Adam and that Christ died for the same. The Presbytery requested that the memorialists formalize their complaint into a libel, a formal charge of heresy with supposed evidences. This was served on Campbell on 9 September with eight signatures. Campbell dictated answers to this for two days and nights, exhausting a number of secretaries. More than 180 handwritten pages were delivered to the Presbytery on 21 September. The Presbytery first found that the libel was relevant, that the teachings in question were heretical. It then sought evidence that Campbell in fact had taught them. Each of many witnesses was heard for as much as seven hours for both the prosecution and the defense in February and March of 1831, at the end of which month the Presbytery found the libel proven and Campbell guilty. The case was appealed to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, which heard it on 13 April. Campbell made a five-hour speech in his defense. One must question the effectiveness of such length and the wisdom of appeals to the Council of Trent. Hissing in the gallery interrupted his remarks about the Westminster Confession of Faith. Lawyers also spoke. Many Synod members left while persons favoring Campbell spoke. The Synod simply referred the matter to the General Assembly, which began hearing it on Tuesday, 24 May. Preliminary matters were concluded around midnight, then discussion of doctrine began. Despite the nearly five-hundred pages of printed materials, charges, answers, evidences, etc., from the lower courts, the case was completed by 6:15 A.M. on Wednesday, 25 May 1831. Irregularities, protests, and appeals abounded all along, but none deterred the direction of the case. Though General Assembly had at least 310 members, only 125 remained through the night and voted. By a count of 119 to 6, John McLeod Campbell was deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland.<sup>7</sup>

Undoubtedly, Campbell was out of harmony with the standards of the church, more than he realized at the time. Still, it is regrettable that the church courts were unwilling to consider whether the church and its standards were out of harmony with the scriptures. Dr. Cook, for instance, reduced the case to the simplest question:

I do not think there was ever a simpler proposition submitted to this Assembly. There is the libel, and there is the Confession of Faith; and we have just to say is the set of propositions contained in that libel, in conformity or identical with the set of propositions upon the same sub-

<sup>7</sup> *Reminiscences*, pp. 33–39; *Memorials*, 1:68–86; *Proceedings*, introduction, p. v-3:194; Story, *Memoir of Robert Story*, pp. 153–178.

jects contained in the Confession of Faith: . . . and after all we have heard, I do not think there has a single word been said that could cause the Assembly to entertain any doubts on the matter.<sup>8</sup>

Later he continued this line of thought to its conclusion:

Sir, I conceive it to be the duty of every man to follow up what he believes to be the dictates of truth. I would not put on him, in this respect, any restraint, or do any thing to prevent him from declaring what he believes to be the truth of God. But he must declare it elsewhere than the Church of Scotland.<sup>9</sup>

Others, too, saw the matter this clearly; when Dr. Hamilton wanted to quote from the printed material, he was interrupted by the suggestion that "as they had all made up their minds upon the case, it was not wished that the proof be read."<sup>10</sup>

Following the vote, the moderator formally deposed Campbell from the ministry with the following words:

It is now my painful duty—painful, indeed, beyond expression—to pronounce the solemn and deliberate judgment of the General Assembly. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sole King and Head of his Church, and by virtue of the power committed by him to it, I do now solemnly depose Mr. John McLeod Campbell, minister of the parish of Row, from the office of the holy ministry, prohibiting and discharging him from exercising the same, or any part thereof, in all time coming, under pain of the highest censure of the Church; and I do hereby declare the Church and Parish of Row vacant, from and after the day and date of this sentence.<sup>11</sup>

Thomas Erskine of Linlathen "never ceased to regard it as the stoning by the Church of Scotland of her best prophet, the deliberate rejection of the highest light vouchsafed to her in his time."<sup>12</sup>

### THE ROW SERMONS ON CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

John McLeod Campbell was a pastor concerned to cultivate among his parishioners at Row a particular Christian experience, the consciousness of being

<sup>8</sup> *Proceedings*, 3:143.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:170.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:165.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:178.

<sup>12</sup> William Hanna, ed., *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1877), 2:361.



children of God. When his reputation began to grow, his sermons were taken down in shorthand, and he was eager for their publication.<sup>13</sup> These present his understanding of God, Christ, humanity, and Christian experience.

Campbell's desire that his hearers experience the joy of God's free grace and forgiveness given in Jesus Christ was thwarted by their prior understanding of predestination, grace, and faith. The realization that they might have been predestined to perdition, so that salvation was beyond them, removed any ground of confidence upon which to stand before God. There remained no sure basis for hope, no reason for joy, no way of knowing whether God was merciful to them. That God was Redeemer remained a distant doctrine, difficult to apply because no one knew his or her standing in election. So the doctrine, despite its emphasis on God's sovereignty and initiative, as well as the efficacy of divine grace, undermined the people's ability to experience the freedom of the gospel. Instead of rejoicing that salvation depended upon the unlimited power of God and not upon their own failing strength, they were left questioning whether they had been included. Christianity became a somber affair. There was no ground of confidence that God was good or loving toward a particular person. There was no capability for joy or rejoicing.

One response to this problem was to look within the self for signs of election. Even if they did not look for reasons for having been elected, they did assume that election would generate evidences, special graces within the individual. If one were elected to salvation, what were the results of faith in the individual? But this turning in upon oneself instead of outward toward Christ exacerbates the problem of sin as self-centeredness. In practice, it becomes difficult to distinguish between an evidence of faith granted after election and a prior reason within the self for election. This represents the degeneration of Christian faith into pure self-righteousness and constitutes a denial of free grace. The result is legalistic religion in which those confident of their own

<sup>13</sup> *Reminiscences*, p. 32. This method might cause concern about building arguments on particular words, but Campbell never offered objection or disclaimer. His sermons were made available in different forms. Some tracts had individual titles. Others, simply numbered, were gathered into the volume *Good Tidings*. Three volumes were lithographed for subscribers, under the title *Notes of Sermons*. Another series of four tracts of several printed sermons each were gathered into a volume also titled *Notes of Sermons*; in its third edition, with a second volume, this was retitled *Sermons and Lectures*, which we shall use. *Responsibility for the Gift of Eternal Life: Compiled by Permission of the Late Rev. John M'Leod Campbell, D.D., from Sermons Preached Chiefly at Row, in the Years 1829-31* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1873), is drawn from *Sermons and Lectures* but is much revised by the compiler and so is not recommended. Along with the seventy-five early sermons there are a few letters in which he discusses other sermons. More than half of these sermons may be dated precisely. The controversy at Row came to an end with his deposition in May 1831. There were farewell sermons in mid-August 1831. If this is the end date, all but one of the pieces come from September 1829 through August 1831.

goodness are not challenged but only made more confident, while those fearful of their lack of goodness are only cast deeper into the depths of despair.

As minister of the gospel, Campbell entered this situation: Christian faith and life were reduced to legalistic perceptions of one's own goodness or evil, denying the freedom of God's grace; attention was directed to the self rather than to Christ, denying the grace of God's freedom; and the doctrine of limited election removed any ground for joy or confidence in the goodness of God toward an individual. Against these misconstruals, Campbell framed his proclamation of the gospel. The path of practical religion, not of speculative theology, led Campbell into his reformulations of the faith.<sup>14</sup> He initially held to the doctrine of election without questioning it, much less altering it. Only as he worked back through these problems did he rethink predestination.

Campbell was concerned about the character of Christian experience. Instead of fearful uncertainty before the Lord, there should be joy in God's forgiveness. Instead of undue self-confidence before the Lord, there should be joyful gratitude for God's free and undeserved goodness. The desired experience implied certain conditions. As Campbell perceived, this joyful experience of the Christian faith and life could rest only upon a prior assurance of God's goodness toward the self. Such a ground of confidence could not be made up of evidences within but based only in the unswerving grace of God's free love toward all people in Christ. This conflicts with the doctrines of limited atonement and limited election. The Christian experience which Campbell understood to agree with the New Testament required a different doctrinal undergirding. For an individual Christian's life to be joyful on the sure basis of God's grace to that person, the extent of the atonement had to be unlimited. The very possibility of an appropriate response to the gospel rested in the confidence of the extension of God's free grace and forgiveness to all who heard the gospel. Finally, this universal forgiveness means that God is loving toward all, so that the very character of God is love.

Thus Campbell reasoned from Christian experience back to a doctrine of God as love. We shall begin with that doctrine of God and work toward his understanding of Christian experience. Campbell directed his hearers toward the love of God as the Fountainhead of all he would have them experience. He preached at Row on 14 and 21 February 1830 from 2 Thess. 3:5, "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."<sup>15</sup> Campbell's great goal was to lead people to love God; the sole

<sup>14</sup> *Memorials*, 1:18-19.

<sup>15</sup> [John] M[cLeod] Campbell, *Sermons and Lectures*, taken in shorthand, 3d ed. of vol. 1, 2 vols. (Greenock: R. B. Lusk; Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, and J. Lindsay and Co.; Belfast: W. M'Comb; Dublin: R. M. Tims; London: J. Nisbet, and Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1832), 1:187, 188.

foundation for this was that God is love; the means that God has provided for this Christian experience is none other than Jesus Christ.

Campbell's preaching stands firm on the assertion that the character of God is love.<sup>16</sup> Campbell means not only that God is loving but also that God is love. God reveals this to be God's character by extending love to all; anything less would not reveal this:

If love be of God's character—if it be of God's substance—if God *is love*, then God loves every man. Yea the person who limits the love of God to some, has actually denied that there is love in God at all, for it would not be love, but mere partiality or caprice: however beneficial to those who were the objects of that capricious choice, yet, in respect of him whose choice it was, it could be no manifestation of character.<sup>17</sup>

This love that God feels toward us is not only the origin of creation and redemption, but is most clearly revealed in the work of God in Christ of putting away sin.<sup>18</sup> The work of Christ does not increase God's love for humanity but makes it visible, and this love of God to all causes the atonement, not the other way around.<sup>19</sup> Campbell believes this view of God's love as freely extending to all, prior to any act of belief or acceptance on the part of the person, is the only adequate view of God's love.<sup>20</sup>

While Campbell insists that love is the fundamental characteristic of God, he maintains that holiness is inseparable. Many of his critics have thought his emphasis on God's forgiving love obliterates any understanding of God's condemning righteousness or holiness. But this is to misunderstand Campbell's view of God's love and holiness in general and of God's forgiveness and judgment in particular. He taught that both love and holiness must be known to know God's character.<sup>21</sup>

Campbell understands the condition of humanity to be one of sin, the extent of which can be known only as one comes to Christ. Campbell variously described sin as pride, as "having become a god to myself," as wrongly directed love, and as ingratitude.<sup>22</sup> Sin results in "the wall of partition" between the

<sup>16</sup> [John McLeod] Campbell, *Notes and Recollections of Two Sermons, Delivered in the Parish Church of Row, on Sunday, 6th September, 1829* (Greenock: R. B. Lusk, 1829), p. 19; [John McLeod] Campbell, *Good Tidings of Great Joy to All People*, new (2d?) ed. (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1873), p. 109.

<sup>17</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:386; cf. *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 3:16, 17, 24; *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:455, 2:177.

<sup>18</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 4:7, 9; *Good Tidings*, p. 80.

<sup>19</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:437, 2:280.

<sup>20</sup> *Good Tidings*, p. 118.

<sup>21</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:11, 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:95; 2:77, 125, 144, 343.



sinner and God, "the imputation of sin—the charging of guilt—the having a sentence of banishment upon you."<sup>23</sup> Campbell accepts a common Protestant and Reformed understanding of the nature and severity of sin.

Similarly, Campbell neither questions the doctrine of the incarnation nor offers any consideration of Christology. He assumes that Christ is the Lord in human nature, serving as mediator between God and humanity. This taking on of human nature does not add to God's knowledge of humanity; it adds to our understanding of God's knowledge of humanity. Moreover, the incarnation adds nothing to God's love for humanity but instead expresses and reveals it.<sup>24</sup> The incarnation constitutes the unquestioned beginning point from which Campbell argues to the love of God and the salvation of humans.<sup>25</sup> Campbell's interest lies not in analyzing the incarnation but in proclaiming its implications and effects.

The work of the incarnate Christ forms the lifelong center of Campbell's thought and exposition. He identified the twofold nature of this work: first, Christ saves people from sin, and second, Christ gives eternal life.<sup>26</sup> Our concern now is with the first, the forgiveness of sins. Campbell's concern about the sinner's ground of confidence before God leads him to a consideration of the extent of the atonement.<sup>27</sup>

Universal atonement represents an act of universal love. Campbell's frequent reference to God loving "every child of Adam"<sup>28</sup> roused the animosity of his opponents who held the doctrine of the limited atonement. More pointedly, Campbell would say that Christ had died for every human being.<sup>29</sup> He came to a decision, by which he stood the rest of his life, about the extent of the atonement. Campbell argues that the parable of the Good Samaritan teaches the universal application of the word "neighbor," so that if Christ had failed to love "every child of Adam," then he would have broken the second clause of the great commandment, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself," in which case he would have disobeyed the law of God and become a sinner. That Christ is not a sinner "is quite enough to show that Christ by his death expressed his love to every human being, which would not be true, unless his death had been for all men." Campbell finds these sorts of ar-

<sup>23</sup> *Good Tidings*, p. 175.

<sup>24</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 2:279–280.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:437.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:33.

<sup>27</sup> *Reminiscences*, p. 24.

<sup>28</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:191; J[ohn] M[cLeod] Campbell, *Notes of a Sermon, Preached in the Parish Church of Row, on Thursday, 8th July, 1830; Being the Day of the Visitation of that Parish by the Presbytery of Dumbarton* (Greenock: R. B. Lusk, 1830), p. 23; *Sermons and Lectures*, 2:112, 445.

<sup>29</sup> *Notes of a Sermon Preached 8 July 1830*, p. 25.

guments necessary because "the extent of Christ's atonement was not a matter of dispute in Apostolic times" so that he "cannot expect to find in the Scripture a direct condemnation of the false doctrine" that Christ died only for believers, though he does find "a clear reference to the true doctrine." For instance, Isa. 53:6 states that "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of *us all*."<sup>30</sup> It is further stated in 1 Tim. 2:6 that Christ Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all." Of this Campbell said: "There is indeed no passage that can more distinctly, or unequivocally, set for the truth that God loves all men; and that truth as proved by the fact that Christ died for all men; there is no passage that more distinctly sets forth this foundation truth of all religion."<sup>31</sup>

Universal atonement leads to universal pardon. Christ has atoned for all sin and has obtained forgiveness for all people. While the law cuts sinners off from God, "the shedding of the blood of Christ" effects an all-embracing forgiveness. This universal forgiveness stands distinct from, and prior to, any response of faith. Forgiveness does not reward faith; it is a prior condition for faith. It extends to all, whether or not they ever come to believe. No one could be expected to believe apart from prior forgiveness. If forgiveness were limited to some unspecified number of persons, no one would ever know whether it applied to him or her. Since people are encouraged by the gospel to believe in God and in God's Christ, they have to know that forgiveness has been extended to them. Therefore, it must be universal. "All men," Campbell preaches, "believers and unbelievers, have a certain standing in Christ; and . . . this standing in Christ, is a non-imputation of sin." He expresses this "forgiveness of all our sins" in terms of "this doctrine of pardon to us all" and of "the remission of sins by the blood of Christ." Campbell stands firm on the universal extent of the atonement.<sup>32</sup>

We cannot overstress the priority for Campbell of what God has done in Christ. To attempt to approach God prior to forgiveness would be "a most awful self-righteousness."<sup>33</sup> Campbell does not hold forgiveness before his hearers as a possibility, but as an accomplished fact. "Christ had died for your sin; He was delivered for your offences, and raised again for your justification: the whole is already done; the work is finished and it meets you in your present condition."<sup>34</sup> Mercy is not offered for the future but proclaimed for the present, for "all the mercy, all the forgiveness, hath come already."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:200, 201; 2:444-446.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:177, 187.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:187; *Reminiscences*, p. 27; *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:367, 2:324, cf. 2:114, 136, 189-90, 224.

<sup>33</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 3:23.

<sup>34</sup> *Good Tidings*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

The "already" in this quote points to the one limitation that Campbell perceives in the mercy of God. Unlimited in extent, it is limited in duration. Though there is mercy in the past and present, to the future belongs judgment. Here Campbell reemphasizes God's holiness: "judgment—righteous, uncompromising judgment—according as men are reconciled to God or are not, alone remaineth to be revealed."<sup>36</sup> This distinguishes Campbell's universal atonement and universal pardon from universalism, or universal salvation. Forgiveness is not limited to a predetermined number of persons, but it is limited in time. Now we live in a "Day of Grace," from the day of Resurrection to the Second Coming. The future will bring a "Day of Judgment." There will be no forgiveness then.<sup>37</sup> Universal pardon is preliminary.

The circumstances are, a present condition of forgiveness, and a prospect of future judgment—a present state of things, in which God is not imputing sin to man, and a future state of things, in which God shall separate men according as they are on God's side or against him—a present state, in which men's sins are not charged against them, and a future state, in which God will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ. . . . the present condition of the human race is, that God has forgiven all men their sins—*not as a permanent and eternal condition of things*, but as a preliminary state—preliminary to a day in which he shall judge men according to the deeds done in the body, whether they have been good or whether they have been evil.<sup>38</sup>

As strongly as Campbell insists that atonement, pardon, and forgiveness are universal, he emphasizes that they are temporary. Campbell is so far from universalism that he does not doubt that the number of people saved will be small, even as Noah's ark saved only eight.<sup>39</sup>

By asserting that the atonement is universal in extent but limited in duration, Campbell denies the efficacy of grace. It remains possible that people can frustrate God's grace and disappoint God's love. Campbell's understanding of universal atonement presents God's grace as that which brings the announcement of salvation to all but not as that which saves all.<sup>40</sup> But if God's grace can be frustrated, upon whom does salvation depend? Under theories of election and limited atonement, God's grace is deemed sufficient to effect

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:221; *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 3:25, sermon 5:9, sermon 7:17; 2, sermon 15:23, sermon 16:25.

<sup>38</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:119.

<sup>39</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 3, sermon 28:27.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 3, sermon 30:8.

the salvation of the elect. The elect do not contribute to salvation; they receive it. But for Campbell to deny election and the limitation of the atonement in order to establish a ground of confidence in those to whom the gospel is preached, and to avoid the heresy of universal salvation, he must draw a dividing line somewhere. The line is drawn at the point of response to God's universal forgiveness. Those who respond appropriately are saved in the end; those who do not are condemned. If the line is not drawn in God's initiative in election, then it is drawn in the human response. This is the weakest point in Campbell's theology of this period. His holding to both universal pardon and limited salvation results in the denigration of the grace of God as nonefficacious. If grace is not irresistible and invincible, how is it sufficient for anyone? How is it grace for a sinner? Or does sin run neither so deep nor so wide as Campbell initially asserts? By his emphasis on the priority of forgiveness, Campbell avoids those formulations that suggest that belief merits pardon. But by distinguishing pardon from salvation, he does suggest that belief merits salvation.

Present universal pardon provides the needed assurance of faith, indeed, "a perfect ground of confidence in the character of God."<sup>41</sup> Nothing is left standing in the way: "Through the work of Christ you are every one of you forgiven sinners—you are every one of you upon the footing of innocent persons before God—having as free access to God as if you had never sinned."<sup>42</sup> With sin removed, no basis for distrusting God remains:

If Christ died for you, then all your sins are atoned for—taken away; and the barrier which they interposed between you and God no longer exists but to your own imagination—God is not imputing sin unto you—you are pardoned—you have a prevailing advocate with God—you have access by the way thus opened up into the holiest;—this is the situation in which you now are. To know the love of God is to know that *you* are at liberty to approach God *as sinless*; that is, that sin, as a cause for distrust, is taken away; and that, as if you had never forfeited it, *you* have given to *you* in Christ a right to rejoice in God's love as in that of a father.<sup>43</sup>

Here Campbell's major insights come together and he is at his strongest: universal atonement provides universal pardon, which reveals the character of God as love and thus provides for the assurance needed for a person to come

<sup>41</sup> *Notes and Recollections of Two Sermons*, p. 30; cf. *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 7:16; *Good Tidings*, p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 7:27.

<sup>43</sup> *Good Tidings*, pp. 114–115.



to faith.<sup>44</sup> As a result of the work of Christ we presently "live under a constitution of things, in which sin is not imputed to any man, in which every man is on the footing of perfect innocence in the way of coming to God."<sup>45</sup>

The nonimputation of sin, the removal of the barrier, and the provision of free access are meant to turn people to God. Campbell desires that his hearers freely and joyfully accept the good news of forgiveness. That appropriation of good news is a turning to God and an entrance upon salvation. Campbell understands that

it is the plan of God that he should place a multitude of sinners, who have come under his condemnation, on the footing of innocent persons, for a season, with the purpose of inducing their returning to him; and that . . . after he has done so, that he shall come and inquire what has been the result of this, and treat them according to that result.<sup>46</sup>

Without this prior forgiveness, no one could repent, return to, or approach God. Without the universality of the forgiveness, God would be shown to be capricious. But with universal atonement and universal (albeit preliminary) nonimputation of sin, God has placed humanity in a condition that allows for return. The work of "Christ the mediator" is that he "has removed this judicial barrier." It is against "the great error" of assuming that there is some barrier to be removed by human repentance, faith, or tears that Campbell presses the reality of forgiveness to every human being, so there is no barrier, nothing to prevent anyone from rejoicing in God. Campbell describes this being without a barrier between humanity and God as having "free access."<sup>47</sup> Thus "guilt is no longer a reason why we should not have liberty to return to God," and Campbell assures his hearers that "*you are at this moment as free to come to God as if you had never sinned at all.*"<sup>48</sup>

The preliminary, temporary character of this condition of "free access" constitutes the necessity of repentance and distinguishes Campbell's thought from any position of limited election or universal salvation. On the one hand, salvation does not depend upon predestination and limited atonement, but upon a timely response to the free grace of God.

<sup>44</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 2:256–257.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:181.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:120.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:44, 2:193, 227. Cf. 1:45, 98; 2:219, 324, 384; *Memorials*, 1:65; *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 5:10.

<sup>48</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:123, 346; cf. 2:56; *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 7:28; cf. *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:79–80.



. . . when God shall judge the world, the question will not be for whom did Christ die: but in whom has the purpose of Christ's death been accomplished? Who are on God's side? Who are God's enemies? This the day of grace, in which God comes forth in Christ in love to all; bidding them repent & give God glory but the day of judgment is a day in which Christ the Lord shall come forth in righteousness & holiness & pour forth the vials of wrath on all who are on the side of Satan & receive into the mansions of Bliss those who are on the side of God. If there were to be remission of sins on a day of judgement it would not be a day of judgement at all. A day of judgement is not a day of remission of sins: but a day for rendering to every man according to his works.<sup>49</sup>

On the other hand, Campbell also rejects universalism. Quite simply, "God's love does not imply safety. . . . pardon is not salvation." Hence the great and "important difference . . . between the state of the person who has returned, and that of the person who has not," the former state being "consciousness of God's favor which cannot be had away from God," a "welcome home again." This life can be gained only by faith which begins in repentance, so that many of these sermons end with a plea to repent. These urgent pleas appeal to what Campbell understands to be a legitimate desire for self-preservation, because interest in one's well-being, though currently needing redemption from the bondage of corruption, is nevertheless one of the ordinances of God.<sup>50</sup>

We cannot stress enough the centrality at this time of these ideas to Campbell's thought: universal atonement, universal pardon, revelation of God's character as love, and provision of the grounds of confidence to go to God.<sup>51</sup> This brings us to a subtle point in Campbell's proclamation of the gospel. Insisting that forgiveness of sins has removed the barrier between humanity and God, Campbell is careful not to erect a new barrier by calling upon his hearers to effect their own return to God. Instead, even this has been accounted for. Campbell asserts that Christ has received the Holy Spirit for the sake of humanity and that the Spirit is the power to return.

My dear friends you must see that the remission of sins is a substantial thing & more than a liberty to come to God. It is a power also, for it is a living way which we have through Christ. It is a living way because there is not merely granted the privilege to approach God but the power

<sup>49</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 3:25.

<sup>50</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:137, 186; 2:28, 110, 117, 340.

<sup>51</sup> *Good Tidings*, pp. 80–81; *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 5:10–11.

in which to walk with God & this is what makes that remission of sins which is preached to be fit to give the answer of a good conscience towards God. That answer is found in that state of mind of a person who is rejoicing in God, understanding that he has not merely liberty to have communion with God but that he has also power provided for him for that communion.<sup>52</sup>

This would seem to be what others identify as efficacious grace, the will of God effecting the salvation of the hearers of the gospel.<sup>53</sup> The effort is made to indicate that both forgiveness and salvation, which Campbell distinguishes, are the work of God in Christ and are not human accomplishments but divine gifts. Campbell portrays the gift of response to forgiveness, which response leads to salvation instead of condemnation on judgment day, in terms of insight, change of disposition, and inspiration. He knows that being at liberty to go with Christ is not the same thing as having the heart to go with Christ; the former, resulting from remission of sins, is preparation for the latter.<sup>54</sup> Still, the reality of the power of the Spirit in Christ to effect response is asserted but not explained. It remains within the power of the hearer to reject the gospel,<sup>55</sup> so the usefulness of this power of the Spirit is unclear.

This leads to one remaining and severe problem which I find with Campbell's thought during this period. What is the relationship of this concept of Christ having the Spirit for us to Campbell's understanding of limited salvation? Those who believe in election have an answer for this. Those who believe that salvation has its roots in the goodness of humanity or in the freedom of will to return to God have an answer for this. But Campbell has closed these avenues. He rejects predestination. He adheres to a belief in the thoroughgoing sinfulness of humanity, acknowledging that the barrier this creates can be overcome, or removed, only by divine initiative and action. Even with the barrier gone, it is Christ who carries us to God, not we ourselves. So the question remains: why is salvation limited? Why, within Campbell's thought, do some turn to God and some do not? He denies limited atonement and limited election in order to say that God's forgiveness extends to all. He denies human ability to return to God unaided and so emphasizes God's graciousness. Where, then, is the dividing line? Is there a later election, one not in regard to the extent of forgiveness but in regard to the extent of response to that forgiveness and thus to salvation? That runs against everything else Camp-

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 3, sermon 28:21-22.

<sup>53</sup> *Good Tidings*, pp. 178-179.

<sup>54</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 7:31-33.

<sup>55</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:21-22.

bell has to say. The gospel of forgiveness which leads to salvation is freely proclaimed. All who hear are encouraged to respond, as if they had the freedom to do so. But, lest they falter, they are encouraged that even their response is enabled by Christ who has received the Holy Spirit for them. So who determines who responds and who does not? This is not ever settled. Realizing that this remains open, let us turn to the nature of the Christ-aided response which Campbell seeks in his hearers.

Campbell recognizes that in order to repent and believe we need a certain power, "a power to understand, and know, and enjoy God." Without it, no one could be expected to glorify God. Campbell also asserts that Christ already has this power for us, which is closely associated with Christ already having the Spirit for us, and it is through these that one enters into the divinely intended renewal of life. God has given the hearers in Christ something they do not have in themselves, namely, the power to believe in God and to rejoice in God. Thus God does not require more of us than God provides for us. "This is the provision, that Christ, whose mind we are required to have, is *God's unspeakable gift TO US*." But we must be clear that we are required to respond in repentance and faith; the purpose of the provision is for us to respond. "God gives you Christ, your brother, as your king, and holds you responsible for the gift."<sup>56</sup>

One necessary aspect then of Campbell's understanding of the Christian experience of transformation is faith. The way for repentance and faith has been made clear by the provision of the grounds of confidence, so the hearer of the gospel is exhorted to act upon these grounds. Campbell distances himself from those who would require faith as a condition for forgiveness; forgiveness first opens the door to faith. Campbell insists that faith not be a work, another barrier to be overcome; Christ already has the power and the Spirit for the hearer to come, or to return, to God. Yet faith is surely required. If not a prerequisite for forgiveness, faith remains a prerequisite for salvation. As such, it stands between the will of God for salvation and the actual accomplishment of salvation. Just as we have seen that Campbell indicates that God's grace is not efficacious, so does this suggest that God's will may not accomplish what it purposes. Campbell admits that this is "a deep mystery"; nevertheless, "it is a part of, and in harmony with, the whole scheme" by which God's "*willingness* does not secure the result by itself, but is a ground for us to trust him for the result; and that *in our trusting him* the result is se-

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 1:45, 2:258–259; *Notes of Sermons*, 2, Address:9; 3, sermon 25:15; *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:75, 2:300; cf. *ibid.*, 1:380, 442, 2:449.

*cured.*"<sup>57</sup> As we have seen above, pardon does not mean safety; instead, trust in pardon means safety.

To have a saving belief in Christ is to have a full assurance and trust in God in regard to one's salvation, so that one is in perfect peace.<sup>58</sup> Campbell distinguishes faith from good works, which flow from faith. Yet faith has to do with one's appropriation of what Christ had already won. "The question we now consider is, how the power of the Son of God comes to be power in me. The answer is, it is by faith: the spirit is received through faith: it is in receiving the truth concerning the Son of God, that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith."<sup>59</sup> Hence, receiving the power or the Spirit is equated with receiving the truth about Christ. Campbell continues, stating that the new life, which is the life of Christ in a Christian, is appropriated by faith, "that is, it was in believing the record concerning the Son of God that life came into him." The Spirit, the water of baptism, and the blood of Christ all testify to the same thing.

See how this mystery ends. It ends in this, Believe and thou shalt be saved—Believe and live: and however deeply mysterious in itself, yet in itself it has this simplicity. All we have to do with men to bring them into this life, is *not* to teach them how to perform some deep, dark, mysterious, inexplicable labour, or piece of work; but just to tell them to believe this, the declaration of the gospel, that Christ sanctified himself for us, that through the faith of the truth we might be sanctified; and that the eternal God is now unveiled in the work of Christ, so that he can enter into a man; and we are all told that Christ is given to us, and in Christ the Spirit; so that we have given to us a right and a power to share in his nature; and we are called on to receive this truth—to welcome this living word which became flesh—to receive his flesh and blood—to receive God in our nature, by the Spirit in us. So that it is not a thing for man to say, I shall sit down and wait, and if God choose to enter into me, well, and if not I cannot help it. This is the truth, the Lord hath put life into a truth, and put the truth forth in a word; and that word is the preached gospel; and that gospel is preached to me, and when I receive it, I receive the Spirit; and yield myself to be dwelt in of the living God.<sup>60</sup>

We can do nothing to please God, for Christ has done all; the only thing between the hearer of the gospel and God's free gift in Christ of eternal life,

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 2:183.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 2:77.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 2:110.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 2:111.



which is perfect peace, is unbelief. Yet Campbell insists that belief does not produce peace; the gospel record presents sufficient prior grounds for peace so that the hearer may appropriate it by faith.<sup>61</sup>

The immediate goal of this Christ-aided response of faith is the Christian life, which Campbell characterizes in strong language: "the holy yearnings of the love of God . . . desires that they should be partakers of a Divine Nature."<sup>62</sup> Again, "the object which God contemplates is altogether worthy of himself, which is that we should be his sons and daughters," this familial relationship being grounded in the persons concerned becoming "partakers of a divine nature."<sup>63</sup> Campbell does not use such language as "divinization," nor does he imply that humans escape the bonds of finitude. What he does say is that Christians have the "mind of Christ"; this he uses interchangeably with saying that Christians have the "mind of God."<sup>64</sup> Slightly less striking formulations include that we should be of one mind with God and have such knowledge of God that leads to conformity to the mind of God.<sup>65</sup> Campbell even suggests that we should be like God to the extent of sharing God's feelings.<sup>66</sup> God, through Christ, is working a transformation in the lives of Christians, and God's goal may be stated in familial terms:

We may state God's purpose thus—God is preparing himself a family of sons and daughters, to be his companions throughout eternity, who shall be capable of entering into His mind and feelings, and thus have the reality of adoption—the spirit of children. This is God's object . . . when we are called upon to have the same mind in us, which was in Christ Jesus.<sup>67</sup>

Campbell's understanding of this transformation remains crucial to his thought throughout his life. Its importance to his early rejection of the doctrine of election has been set forth: ". . . when God shall judge the world, the question will not be for whom did Christ die? but in whom has the purpose of Christ's death been accomplished?"<sup>68</sup> Campbell uses common Christian terms such as change, conversion, and transformation to discuss this. His specifications of its nature are rarer, though not entirely lacking. At one point he encourages his listeners to consider what would be the case if "the glory

<sup>61</sup> *Good Tidings*, pp. 21–22, 24–25; cf. *Reminiscences*, p. 27.

<sup>62</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 4:11.

<sup>63</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:460.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:37, 63; *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 7:29; *Sermons and Lectures*, 2:105, 195.

<sup>65</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 7:12; *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:434–435.

<sup>66</sup> *Good Tidings*, p. 71; *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:8.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:64.

<sup>68</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 3:25.

of God occupied that place in the heart of people which selfishness now does." This kind of language suggests a replacement of self-centeredness with an orientation toward God, a change of focus and direction. Campbell of course realizes that any present transformation is limited.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, it is real. "The healing of man—the blessing of man—the saving of man—consists in his heart being directed into the love of God—in his being brought to dwell in the love of God." That is, to be saved implies a change of character.<sup>70</sup> "The true Christian's change is in consequence of the seeing of a forgiving love towards him in God of which he has been the object all along." This forgiveness from without gives peace and confidence: "the true Christian is substantially and inwardly different from the person that is not a Christian." The fruits of such inward change have to do with an outward exhibition of "perfect holiness"; indeed, such is "the object of the incarnation of the eternal word."<sup>71</sup> Despite the evil influences that surround a person, Campbell insists that "there is, in Christ, power for me, to enable me to be holy as Christ is holy."<sup>72</sup> This change, this conversion or transformation from evil to holiness, from self-centeredness to the glorification of God, is the goal of Christian experience for Campbell. One does not receive forgiveness simply to remain in sin. To know the joy of forgiveness is to be moved along the way to the life of Christ-like holiness. It is the experiential aspects of Christianity that concern Campbell the pastor. The theological formulations explicate the possibilities and actualities of changed lives.

This completes our explication of Campbell's thought from his sermons of this period. His concern is for a certain quality of Christian experience on the part of his hearers. His theology delineates what he understands to be true about God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit in order for this to occur. Its source is the love of God which leads to Christ's incarnation and work of universal atonement and pardon. These provide the grounds for confidence and assurance. Moreover, Christ has the Spirit for us, the power for us to respond in repentance and faith. These lead to a change within persons from evil to holiness. This transformation is the goal of Christ's work and of Campbell's preaching. Campbell retains an emphasis on God's holiness which leads to a temporal limitation of forgiveness. This accentuates the necessity of response to the gospel and destroys any notion of the efficacy of God's grace.

Now we shall turn to an analysis of the authorities to which Campbell ap-

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 1, sermon 6:18, 30.

<sup>70</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:136, 220.

<sup>71</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 4:29; 3, sermon 27:8, 28:7.

<sup>72</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 2:375.

peals. The most immediately obvious authority in his sermons is the Bible. Every sermon is an extensive exposition and application of a biblical text. Campbell holds the Scriptures in high regard. He accepts as a major task of his calling the responsibility to preach to the people the word of God as written in the Bible. So focused was his attention upon the Bible that he would use no commentaries in the preparation of his sermons, "unless in seeking to ascertain the precise translation of the original," and he never read in advance anyone else's sermons on his texts.<sup>73</sup> He understood his teaching at Row to be expressive of the Bible.<sup>74</sup> Campbell refers to the texts of the Bible as having been given to us "by the inspired penman"; he exudes confidence that there are no opposite and contradictory meanings in the Bible; he insists that the character of God visible to the mind is "revealed in the inspired writings"; the Bible "distinctly" and "unequivocally" sets forth the truth.<sup>75</sup> Campbell insists that the Psalms are the words of Christ, which observation he offers as an encouragement to read the Psalms.<sup>76</sup> Campbell deals with the authority of an Old Testament text as having immediate reference to the people of Israel, ultimate reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, and direct application to his hearers.<sup>77</sup> Clearly, the Bible constitutes a high and important authority for Campbell's thought.

However, for Campbell the authority of Scripture remains under the higher authority of Christian experience. It might seem from his sermons that his understanding of Christian experience is drawn from the Bible. Campbell asserts that the opposite is true. His understanding of Christian experience determines his reading of the Bible. His desire to cultivate a particular type of experience led to choosing and giving "special interest to those portions of Scripture, and those aspects of the truth, which most obviously and unmistakably connected themselves with this end," so "large portions of Scripture were left out of account in my teaching, both in preaching and in private intercourse."<sup>78</sup> Campbell's acceptance of the Bible as the word of God rests neither upon the Bible itself nor upon the church, but upon his own experience: "my faith in Revelation had this root[,] that I recognised the God who spoke to me in my own heart as speaking to me in the Bible."<sup>79</sup> Because

<sup>73</sup> *Reminiscences*, p. 11; cf. *Memorials*, 1:18.

<sup>74</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:187.

<sup>75</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 4:1; *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:25, 43, 2:177.

<sup>76</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 2, sermon 21:2; 3, sermon 23:3.

<sup>77</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 2:278.

<sup>78</sup> *Reminiscences*, p. 126.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124; cf. *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:452, 2:449, 450.

Campbell understands his conscience to be an experience of God's word prior to the Bible, his conscience has priority over the Bible.

But what is taught is that God did really write that law on your heart which testifies that man is a sinner, & that that law is not contradicted by the revelation contained in God's word. If indeed the Bible contradicted my conscience, then I might reject the Bible because it professes to be a word of God, & I have previously got a word from God in the conscience & one word of God cannot contradict another therefore if it contradicted conscience its claim to be from God must be false.<sup>80</sup>

I am not aware of any instance of Campbell insisting upon this prerogative, which indicates that he understands these two words of God, the Bible and his conscience, to speak the same. Nevertheless, a priority for Christian experience over even the Scriptures is established.

Christian experience is vital to Christianity for Campbell: "It is the *life* of Christianity *experimentally to know it*."<sup>81</sup> Apart from Christian experience, Christianity is dead. Knowledge of the Bible does not suffice; orthodoxy avails for nothing; experiential appropriation of the gospel counts for all: ". . . the key to it all is, *this* is a personal demand upon every man for a personal religion, i.e., a personal faith, a personal hope, a personal love, a personal regeneration, a personal new life. Few have these personals to meet the demand."<sup>82</sup> It has been suggested that Campbell's insistence upon the experiential aspects of Christianity grew out of not only his own Christian upbringing but also "the wide range of his early studies, and his familiarity with the principles of scientific research."<sup>83</sup> The scientific method has to do with induction instead of deduction; it is not a respecter of authorities but a questioner of authorities. Campbell was not inclined to accept doctrines or creeds for their own sakes but to examine first the experience of Christians and then see what doctrine could account for that. Christian experience became Campbell's source for knowledge about the faith, the goal of his preaching and ministry, and the authority for his theology.

He presses this concern upon his hearers. Faith that consists of acceptance of things taught by others must yield to a personal, intimate experience of God; words learned from the Bible are confirmed by direct intercourse with God.<sup>84</sup> The "character of true religion" is "real, practical, experimental."<sup>85</sup>

<sup>80</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 3, sermon 28:20.

<sup>81</sup> *Memorials*, 1:66.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:68.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:8.

<sup>84</sup> *Notes of Sermons*, 1, sermon 9, part 2:8, 9; cf. *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:19.

<sup>85</sup> *Sermons and Lectures*, 1:350.



Campbell staked everything upon his view that only Christ's universal atonement and pardon could effect life and that Christ's purpose in them was to give life.

This news is the bread of life. And show me the man that believes it, and has not life, and then I will give all up. Show me the man that *believes in his heart*, that the eternal Son of God died for him, and that he has forgiveness through the blood of Christ, and that Christ has the Holy Spirit for him—show me the man who believes this and is not alive, and *then* I will say there is no life in the truth.<sup>86</sup>

Campbell takes care to stress the importance of the experience of God, not simply of experience itself. The latter he described as the error of teaching people “to make a Christ of their experience.” Campbell sought the opposite, to “direct their attention away from themselves to Christ,”<sup>87</sup> for only this object of Christian experience makes it Christian.

This review of Campbell's early sermons shows that his theology can best be understood through the analysis and explication of the mainspring of his thought, the increasingly explicit and dominant emphasis upon personal transformation that runs throughout his life and work. The goal of Christian life is to be transformed to Christ-likeness; the task of theology is to understand such transformation and to explicate the grounds of its possibility. Life that claims to be Christian but exhibits no personal religious and moral transformation is highly suspect; theology and doctrines that fail to account for and that inhibit such transformation are cast out and replaced.

### THE TRIAL ON THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT

John McLeod Campbell's preaching, designed to cultivate in his hearers a certain kind of Christian experience, ranges over topics all along his order of salvation, from the doctrine that God is love to the final emphasis upon the hearer's Christian experience of glorifying and enjoying God. His trial for heresy isolated the three most offensive teachings for intense scrutiny: universal atonement, universal pardon, and the assurance of faith. Campbell considers these essential grounds for Christian experience. He argued for them strenuously before the church courts, upon both biblical and confessional grounds, but to no avail. At the end, few if any more of his judges understood him than at the beginning. To some extent, his conviction grew from party politics and from his hearers' refusal to be open to new ideas. On the other

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 2:112.

<sup>87</sup> *Good Tidings*, p. 16.

hand, much resulted from his extravagantly long defenses, his unwise citation of certain confessional authorities, and his refusal to relinquish vocabulary that confused his hearers and conjured up memories of heresies already condemned. Most of all, the trial had to do with Campbell's novel ideas, however poorly articulated or comprehended at the time.

The trial moved from the Presbytery of Dumbarton, through the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, and to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Excesses and irregularities abounded at every step of the way. We need to examine the content of Campbell's thought and the authorities upon which he bases it. His answer to the libel, his speech before the Synod, and his speech before the General Assembly constitute the most valuable sources among the extensive records.

Campbell was charged with holding and repeatedly promulgating the doctrines of universal atonement and pardon and the doctrine that assurance is of the essence of faith, all of these being taken to be contrary to the Scriptures, to the Westminster Confession of Faith, and to an act of the General Assembly in 1720. We must remember that by "universal pardon" Campbell does not at all mean "universal salvation"; this seems seldom to have been understood. A great deal of the opposition grew out of an expressed fear that universalism leads to antinomianism and moral laxity, even though Campbell seeks rigorously to inculcate holiness among his hearers. Second, the assurance that Campbell holds to be essential to faith is that logically prior assurance that God is good to this individual, which confidence is grounded in universal pardon; Campbell does not by this teaching refer to the logically subsequent assurance of salvation that is not of the essence of faith. Moreover, Campbell is not, as we shall see, entirely clear or consistent in his teaching. Add to this the debate running throughout the trial about the relative status of Scripture and the Confession of Faith and about the constitutional status of the act of the 1720 General Assembly, and some sense of the complexity of the trial begins to emerge.

Campbell's defense presents the same teaching on the three doctrines in question as does his preaching of this time. He freely admits that he teaches these things, and while he does not recognize all the quotes attributed to him and denies some of them, Campbell's defense is that the charges are irrelevant because the teachings are consistent with Scripture and the confessional standards. His judges had hoped he would recant, but he proclaimed his belief all the more.

The doctrines stated in the major proposition of the libel, as contrary to the Scriptures, and the standards of the church; are thus expressed,

“Universal atonement, and pardon through the death of Christ, and that assurance is of the essence of faith and necessary to salvation.” *Understanding these expressions in the sense in which I might use them*, my answer to the libel is, that it is *altogether irrelevant*, inasmuch as the statement of the major proposition is *altogether untrue*, and I now desire, as briefly as may be, without the risk of obscurity, to state to my Brethren the doctrines of universal atonement and pardon through the death of Christ, and that assurance is of the essence of faith, and essential to salvation, *as I hold and teach* them: showing their consistency with, and authority from, the Holy Scriptures, and then, that they are in nothing contrary to, but are altogether in harmony with, our church’s standards.<sup>88</sup>

On the first count, Campbell made it clear from the beginning that he held to universal atonement.

*First*, As to the extent of the atonement; I hold and teach that Christ died for all men—that the propitiation which he made for sin, was for all the sins of all mankind—that those for whom he gave himself an offering and a sacrifice unto God for a sweet smelling savour, were the children of men without exception and without distinction.<sup>89</sup>

In these answers to the Libel at the Presbytery, Campbell wanted to speak directly to those who would judge him, and he did not want to evade them; if they were to convict him, it would be on the basis of his own words, not hearsay. In expression and support of this doctrine of universal atonement, Campbell brings forth before the Synod an argument about Christ’s obedience to the command to love one’s neighbor.

Now, my dear fathers and brethren, whom I seek to address as in the feeling of the presence of our Father and our God, I ask you whether you do not all believe that Christ fulfilled the righteous law of God?—whether you do not all believe that Christ came under that law, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy soul, heart, mind, and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself? I ask you, then, *whether you do not believe that Christ did love his neighbour as himself*? And I ask you, whether you believe that *he himself has taught us* to regard *every human being as our neighbours*? And do you not believe that the man Christ Jesus did love every human being, as a man—I say as a righteous man—as a man fulfilling the righteous law of God? If, then, the righteous, Christ Jesus, did love every human being, and if the mind of Christ is the mind of God, surely it follows—alas! that any should wish any thing else to

<sup>88</sup> *Proceedings*, 1:15.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:16.

follow—it follows that God loveth every human being. I ask then, how did Christ express his love, and how that he loved every man as himself? Was it not by his deeds?—was it not by his dying, as well as by all his other doings?—was it not *in that*, above all his other doings, that he set forth his love? If, then, Christ loved all, and if thus it appears that God loved all—and if Christ's actings expressed his love, which is God's love, to all, then his great act of humbling himself to the death, even the death of the cross, this great act must be expressive of the love of Christ to all men, and, therefore, of the love of God to all men.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, before the General Assembly, Campbell asserted that whatever improvement in the lot of man came from the atonement, that improvement applied to all.

. . . I do teach that the atonement was for the whole human race, without exception and without distinction, and that in whatever more favourable situation any sinner is placed, by the fact that his sins have been atoned for, that more favourable situation is enjoyed by every child of Adam,—and that the change produced in any man's condition by the fact of Christ's dying for him, is a change produced in the condition of all inasmuch as Christ had died for all. And that, *in as far* as the work of God in Christ is a thing *exterior to a man*, and not a part of the history of his own soul, that *to that extent* the thing is universal as respects the children of men.<sup>91</sup>

The second doctrine for which Campbell was being tried, universal pardon, flows from the first. He distinguishes three meanings of pardon. The first has to do with granting total security to the sinner; in this conception, universal pardon would mean universal salvation, which Campbell rejects as unscriptural and antinomian. A second meaning would be the actual receiving back of the sinner, which definition Campbell also declines. The third definition, the precise specification of what Campbell means by universal pardon, is "the removing of the judicial barrier which guilt imposes between the sinner and God; so making the fact of being a sinner no hindrance to his coming to God, now, as to a reconciled Father."<sup>92</sup> Only this removal of the barrier applies to all people. Forgiveness is universal in extent but limited in duration. Moreover, this pardon is prior to repentance rather than something that must wait and depend upon repentance. Campbell firmly rejects such Arminian understandings as "the sanctifying with the name of religion pure self-

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 2:182–183.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 3:50.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 1:32.



righteousness.”<sup>93</sup> So belief does not earn or create pardon, but receives as true God’s testimony to pardon already given.<sup>94</sup> Without prior forgiveness, no one could repent or turn to God. Pardon provides the foundation for repentance.<sup>95</sup> Campbell stood by this teaching to the end, even offering to the General Assembly to accept a rebuke about unwise use of particular words if they would admit the substance of it.<sup>96</sup>

The attempt to distinguish three meanings of pardon was not well received. The attempt to specify that the assurance which is of the essence of faith was distinct from the assurance of salvation brought about even greater confusion and objection. The assurance of which Campbell teaches has to do with personal confidence that the previously announced universal atonement and universal pardon apply to and include oneself. These are prior to repentance. Assurance means the acceptance of the gospel of forgiveness as it applies to the self. As such, assurance is the first movement of faith and is of the essence of faith, for without this assurance there would be no faith. In his own words, the doctrine that assurance is of the essence of faith means that “*believing* the gospel” necessarily includes “the *certainty* that the person believing is the object of God’s love manifested to him in the gift of Christ.” This confidence in the external reality of God’s forgiveness differs from the later assurance of salvation, the inner “assurance of being in a state of salvation,” which is related

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 1:36.

<sup>94</sup> Campbell specifies this more carefully before the Synod:

I further teach, that this work of God in Christ being a work that has for its object the return of man to God, does bear upon its front, and reveal as its first aspect, the remission of the sins of the whole world;—that in Christ God came forth to man, testifying to him—as a thing that he is now invited to realize as true, and in the realizing of which as true, he is to be emboldened to come to God.

I believe that many have realized a good will in God to all men, who have not realized a forgiveness of the sins of all men. I do not teach the former—I teach the latter. I do not reach merely a good will, but a good will expressed in the remission of sin through the blood of Christ, and in this giving to its objects a standing and a place which they would not have otherwise had—the place of persons whose sins are remitted. (Ibid., 2:185)

<sup>95</sup> “This is the doctrine which I am charged with as heresy, under the name of universal pardon—this is the doctrine which I hold to be taught in every page of the book of God where a sinner is called on to repent; and according with this doctrine alone, do I see it a reasonable and intelligible command which God addresses to his sinful creatures, when he calls upon them to repent.

“... But what is repentance? Is it not the heart turning to God, and putting trust in God, and glorifying God as God? Is it not coming from the condition of being as gods to ourselves, into the condition of having God reigning in our hearts? And can any man repent—can any man turn to God—can any man receive God to reign in his heart, so long as he does not know that God has forgiven him? Can any man rejoice in God *as God*, who does not see in that God his own friend, his own Redeemer, his own forgiving and loving Father?” (Ibid., 2:186, 187).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 3:55.

but distinct and can at times be interrupted. That is, a converted person may at times fall away from the assurance of salvation, “the blessed consciousness of being a child of God, and an heir to glory,” without losing salvation itself.<sup>97</sup> Clearly this assurance of which Campbell speaks is necessary for salvation, in that faith itself is necessary.<sup>98</sup> But Campbell did not want to say that assurance of salvation is necessary for salvation. That assurance is something added to faith, not the initial and essential movement of faith.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 1:45, 48, 49. Campbell expanded upon this before the Synod:

The next doctrine charged as heresy, is the doctrine that assurance is of the essence of faith—that is, that the person who believes the testimony which God has given of his Son—the person who believes what God has taught of himself, is enjoying an assurance of God’s love *towards him*; and of *such a love* in God towards him as produces in him a trust—a *confident and undoubting trust in God for all that is good, as what God is willing to give to him, and what he may, with confidence, trust God for*. Now I am enlightened concerning the name of my God in contemplating the work of the Lord Jesus Christ—the name of him from whom I have deeply revolted. Now I see that he indeed loves me, and tenderly cares for me—that even my miseries have been no proof of want of love in him—they have only declared his condemnation of my sin. Now I see the *justice* of the condemnation—now I see the *righteousness* of it—now, therefore, I shall no longer depart from the Lord my God; but henceforward put my perfect trust in God, and commit myself to him, and look to him for that which is good.

“This assurance I teach to be of the essence of faith; that is, that no person can believe—that no person can really and truly believe that which God has revealed of himself, without being brought into this state of mind towards God, that he has a most undoubted trust in God for all that his soul desireth. There is not a wish, which he will allow his heart to cherish, with which he cannot, and does not, trust his God. This trust in God I hold to be inseparable from the *exercise* of true faith, and this is the doctrine with which I understand myself to be charged, in being charged with teaching that assurance is of the essence of faith. (Ibid., 2:189)

<sup>98</sup> “Now faith, implying this assured trust in God, I have taught to be necessary to salvation—and this is the last part of what is charged as heresy against me. And as this is a part of the subject which I have not noticed at any length in my answer to the libel, I shall now dwell upon it a little more fully.

“In saying that assurance is necessary, the thing taught is that the principle upon which God judges the world is this, that having revealed himself to men’s hearts, and having invited their confidence to himself, in the Lord Jesus Christ, he will take account of men, according as they have or have not trusted their God; and that none who have refused to trust God, so revealed, can escape the wrath to come. Therefore to say that assurance of faith is necessary to salvation, is to say that, in order to be saved, we must trust in God,—it is to say that we must be righteous in order to be saved—it is to require that men should cease to trust in man—in the creature, and come to trust in the living God” (ibid., 2:190).

<sup>99</sup> “I do distinctly disclaim the admission, in regard to this, that I am here charged with teaching that assurance of *salvation* is of the essence of faith. I have never so taught, and I am not charged with so teaching.

“... assurance is of the essence of faith, which means nothing more nor less than that the man who believes any thing that God speaks to him, in believing it is sure that God speaks truth. But I believe the thing intended to be objected to here, is the feeling of personal confidence in God’s good will toward myself, individually, and in God’s forgiveness of me, individually, which I hold and teach to be inseparable from the exercise of faith; and I therefore state, that I do hold

This sets forth Campbell's teachings in his own words on the three doctrines with which he was charged. Now we shall examine the authorities to which he appealed in support of them. The first is Scripture and the second is the Westminster Confession of Faith, particularly because he was accused of being at variance with them. But through it all, Campbell's underlying appeal is to the character of Christian experience.

In direct response to the charge, Campbell sets forth to show that his teachings are the doctrine of Scripture. He calls attention to some of the same passages upon which his sermons are based, then argues with increasing intensity that the doctrine of universal atonement is agreeable to Scripture in general, is not contradicted by any Scripture, and is proved by express Scripture. Universal pardon is also presented as consistent with Scripture, then assurance of the essence of faith is a necessary conclusion from the first two doctrines.<sup>100</sup> Again, we find one of his favorite arguments that since Christ reveals God, and Christ teaches us to love neighbor as self, and Christ teaches us to love all neighbors, and Christ obeys his own teachings, therefore Christ reveals that God loves all, which is to say that the atonement extends to all.<sup>101</sup> Elsewhere he makes broader statements, such as appealing to the whole book of Psalms as evidence for the assurance of faith.<sup>102</sup> Thus freely admitting the doctrines, Campbell seeks to demonstrate their truth from the Scripture and avoid the conviction of heresy, insisting that "the Scriptures must be held as of unlimited authority" so that "no doctrine can be regarded as heretical upon any lower ground than that it is not according to the word of God."<sup>103</sup>

The courts thought differently. Charges of departure from the standards remained. There was no openness to the possibility that the standards had de-

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and teach that no man is in the exercise of faith in the testimony of God concerning his Son, who does not feel, in his heart, assured that whatever is contained in the gift of Christ, is bestowed by God, freely, upon himself—that whatever love is expressed by the death of Christ, is love in God *to himself*—as well as that whatever holiness expressed by the death of Christ is God's hatred of *his sin*. I hold and teach this, that it is altogether a personal word which God speaks to sinful men; and that the Word made flesh is a personal Word, and that the name of God, revealed in the work of Christ, is the name by which God would have *everyman* to know God; and that the name is the name of one loving, and freely forgiving the sinner. I have, therefore, taught that assurance is of the essence of faith—i.e. that it is not possible for any one to be in the exercise of faith, who is not free to declare that he has discovered and seen, in the word of God, that God loves him—that Christ died for him—that Christ has the Spirit for him—that Christ has all blessing for him; and who is not thus free to connect himself with all the fulness of the grace of God in Christ" (ibid., 3:58, 59).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 1:16–47.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 2:182–183.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 2:191.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 1:51, 3:48.



parted from the Scriptures or that they could be improved in the slightest degree; John McLeod Campbell was on trial, not the Westminster Confession of Faith. He was required to extend his defense to include the limited authorities of the church's confessions. Part of this takes the form of an argument from silence: Campbell holds that since the Westminster Confession of Faith does not speak against universal atonement and pardon, it assumes them. Then he appeals to earlier confessions which do make explicit the love of God for all in Christ, the ground for this appeal being the historical argument that the Westminster Confession of Faith is meant to vindicate them. Beyond this point Campbell ranges throughout the collection of confessions he is using, clearly seeking to show that the church has at important junctures in the past subscribed to what he was teaching. But the courts remained unconvinced that these other confessions had any authority over them.

Some serious confusion emerges during discussion of the standards. Despite what we have seen in Campbell's sermons and despite what he says about the deficiencies of the confessions, he continues to insist that the doctrines he teaches are not inconsistent with the standards.<sup>104</sup> Just as in his sermons he both rejected the doctrine of election and yet made allusions to it, so here does he champion a doctrine of universal atonement apart from election and yet try to maintain some form of election, farther along in the order of salvation. It seems not to occur to him that election at any point would destroy the universal appeal he wished to make for people to respond freely to the gospel. These inconsistencies were not exposed during the trial. Accordingly, Campbell continues to think that his teaching is not opposed to the standards, even if it does stand outside them; what he does not see clearly at this time is that his teaching stands firmly against the standards. Despite this confusion, Campbell does regard the confessions as authoritative. Though their authority is limited by scripture, it is real. Confessions vary in quality, such that "there is an awful falling off in the Confession we now have." The Westminster Confession of Faith is truth but not the whole truth; it is not infallible.<sup>105</sup>

Campbell was not charged with teaching doctrines opposed to Christian experience. The standards are doctrinal, not experiential. So he does not yield discrete sections of his responses to treatments of Christian experience. Yet it is everywhere to be found. It determines his choice of scripture for preaching and for his defense. His understanding of Christian experience informs how he reads the Bible and what he finds there. It affects his appropriation of the

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:197.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:226, 227.



church's confessions. Indeed, Christian experience becomes and remains the ultimate authority to which Campbell appeals for his preaching and teaching.

As a part of his explication of his doctrine of universal pardon which he understood to be the necessary foundation for exhorting anyone to repent, Campbell defined repentance as "an actual *transition* from the condition of not giving God glory, to the condition of glorifying and enjoying him." Such language from the standards is soon joined by his own description of experience as "the blessed consciousness of being a child of God."<sup>106</sup> This consciousness is that upon which all else rests in Campbell's thought. The fundamental Christian experience is the awareness of being a child of God. Scripture is searched and doctrine framed in the ways most conducive to this goal. Campbell even states that the opposition to his doctrine rises from the uncomfortable experience on the part of the natural man who is left no room for indecision after hearing the gospel. But Campbell's goal is to lead people to feel in the condition to rejoice in God.<sup>107</sup> So confident is he in his formulation of the gospel, so convinced in his ministry by the positive results of Christian experience, that he can make this startling claim: "I would further state, that no person receiving this teaching, and believing it, has failed in finding perfect peace to his own soul—perfect confidence towards God, *and that without being in the least led to think that before being reconciled to God, his state was a safe one.*"<sup>108</sup>

Campbell's defense did not prevail. The church courts were not convinced that his teaching was in accord with either the Bible or the standards. The courts certainly did not care to reexamine the church's confessions in light of Campbell's understanding of Christian experience. They did provide occasion for him to set forth as clearly as possible his teaching of the gospel, his understanding of the order of salvation, especially the three major doctrines of universal atonement, universal pardon, and the assurance of faith. We must admit that it is not entirely clear. To some extent, that problem is remedied as his life and thinking progress. What is clear, from this earliest time in his life as a minister, is that the authorities from which he derives his thinking include the Bible and confessions but also Christian experience, his understanding of which colors his appropriation of the first two.

We have already seen that the trial ended in John McLeod Campbell's deposition from the ministry. Immediately prior to the vote, Campbell's father said this in his defense:

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 1:38, 49.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 3:55.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 3:57.

Moderator . . . I am the oldest father at present in this house. I have been forty years a minister in the Church. And I do not generally trouble you with long speeches; for, till last year, my voice was never heard in the Assembly, except to give a vote. It is gratifying to my feelings to state what I have now done, and it ought to be gratifying to yours; for you should be glad to hear that any one of your brethren has been useful in his parish, and is beloved by his people. A great deal was said, from the other side of this house, about dealing gently and leniently with Mr. C. Now, I would just ask, where is the leniency and gentleness, if you go into the motion on your table, and cut him off *brevi manu* from the Church. You have not done Mr. C. justice, in attending to what has this day been laid before you. You have heard him this day in his own defense, and he has told you what he teaches.—That he just teaches that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”; and with regard to universal pardon, he has told you, that he just means by it, “That sinners may come to God, through Jesus Christ, as to a reconciled Father.” Now, I am sure there is none among us all who has any thing to say against this. And with regard to assurance, Sir, what he says is no more than this, that a Sceptic is no Christian, that doubting God is not believing him. And he has told you that he abhors what are called the Antinomian doctrines of “the Marrow”; and I am sure, Sir, I can say that I never heard any preacher more earnestly and powerfully recommending holiness of heart and life. It was certainly what I never expected, that a motion on your table for his immediate deposition should have come from my old friend Dr. Cook, but I do not stand here to deprecate your wrath. I bow to any decision to which you may think it right to come. Moderator, I am not afraid for my son, though his brethren cast him out the Master whom he serves will not forsake him; and, while I live, I will never be ashamed to be the father of so holy and blameless a son. Indeed, Sir, in these respects, I challenge any one in this house to bring forward any one who can come into competition with him.<sup>109</sup>

### CONCLUSION

John McLeod Campbell did not set out to become a theologian but, instead, a pastor. It could be said that he was not a theologian at this time, in that

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 3:176–178.

he was not an advanced student of theology, not a professor of theology, and not the author of theological treatises. Yet Campbell did not regard the work of a theologian and that of a minister as mutually exclusive. It was precisely as a minister, in the exercise of his pastoral duties, that Campbell needed, sought, and found theological insights. He did not to any great extent draw upon the theological work of those who had gone before him, apparently because he had not read it. He did not attempt to articulate a complete system of theological thought, that being beyond his level of consistency and clarity at the time and not being his goal. He did not even state a particular theological method or program to follow, perhaps because it was just being formed as he went along. But what Campbell did, he did very well.

Campbell was a pastor, a preacher, a student of the Bible, and a thinker. His work brought him face to face with a severe pastoral problem of an inability to hear and receive the gospel. Reflection on this negative experience caused him to consider, explore, analyze, and plumb the depths of the Christian experience he sought for his hearers, namely, the consciousness of being a child of God. Obstacles to the experience were removed; the way was cleared. The nature of the experience required certain preconditions. Campbell turned confidently to the Scripture as the highest authority; to it he brought the authority of his understanding of Christian experience. One would not at all want to say that the latter was unfaithful to or uninformed by the former; nevertheless, it becomes clear that the latter informs his selections from and understanding of the former. His theological insights find sermonic expression: consciousness of being a child of God requires repentance, which requires assurance of faith, which requires universal pardon, which rests upon universal atonement, which alone reveals the character of God as love. Thus this dedicated, single-minded preacher voices an order of salvation somewhat at odds with the doctrinal tradition of the church in which he ministers.

His efforts were not well received. The church at large officially rejected him, though we should note that last-minute evidence at the trial showed that more than ninety-five percent of his adult parishioners warmly loved him and sought that he be allowed to continue as their pastor.<sup>110</sup> The reasons for his rejection are many, complex and of varying worthiness. Some had to do with the immediate context of the Church of Scotland. The Church was sharply divided between two parties, the Moderates and the Evangelicals. Campbell sided with neither and criticized both. He was led away from the Moderates'

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:175-176.

orthodox doctrine of election and from the Evangelicals' Arminianism. He owed nothing to either party, and they owed nothing to him.<sup>111</sup>

More than a little of the opposition to Campbell was roused by his poor choice of vocabulary and the difficulties of his articulation of his thoughts. His hearers complained of it at the trial. As Dr. Grahame said, "There is a good deal of mystification in his statements—a good deal of what is called darkening counsel by words without knowledge."<sup>112</sup> To this Dr. Hamilton added:

. . . his language is of such a nature, as to render plain subjects unintelligible. He has perverted and misapplied the words of Scripture, and the words of the very Standards which he solemnly pledged himself to observe.

. . . The whole of his teaching is a strange misapprehending of the meaning of religious language, and is the origin of much perversion and misrepresentation.<sup>113</sup>

Even his sympathizers expressed difficulty. Dr. Chalmers held Campbell to be "in conduct irreproachable—in doctrine unexceptionable—but in language rash."<sup>114</sup>

Nevertheless, while Campbell's language generated confusion, deeper problems with his thought were apprehended. As Dr. Dewar assured him, "the day will never come when a minister will have to leave the church simply for holding to the freeness and fulness of the salvation of the gospel."<sup>115</sup> The doc-

<sup>111</sup> John Cunningham explains: ". . . he was deposed by an almost unanimous vote of the House—both parties, the Moderates and the Evangelicals, agreeing in execrating his heresy, and congratulating one another that though they might differ in points of polity they could combine to cast out a man who believed that the Creator loved all his creatures" (*Church History of Scotland*, vol. 2, chap. 27, p. 447, quoted in C. G. M'Crie, *The Confessions of the Church of Scotland: Their Evolution in History*, The Seventh Series of the Chalmers Lectures [Edinburgh: MacNiven and Wallace, 1907], p. 105, n. 1).

<sup>112</sup> *Proceedings*, 2:355.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:357. Professor Alexander later expands upon this and adds some patronizing advice:

He has, as it seems to men, no aptitude for the luminous expression, the subtle dialectics, the clear and convincing ratiocination which form the accomplished polemic. On the contrary I have seldom read or heard a theological argument, if such it can be called, that was more perfectly exempt from these qualities; or which left the mind in a state of more blank uncertainty as to the drift and applicability of the author's argumentation.

. . . I am honestly persuaded that whoever may happily recall him from the speculations for which he has no genius, to the plain, unpretending, unambitious duties of a Christian pastor, is at the same time most truly a friend both to the Rev. Appellant and to the Church of Christ. (*Ibid.*, 3:139–140)

<sup>114</sup> William Hanna, ed., *Memoir of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Sutherland and Knox, 1881), 3:15, quoted in Story, *Memoir of Robert Story*, p. 175.

<sup>115</sup> *Proceedings*, 2:275.



trine of election, originally presumed by Campbell, was effectively though perhaps not entirely knowingly rejected as his thought developed in this period. He repeatedly claimed to be in conformity with the standards. But finally, as the trial concluded, he realized the distance he had come. Two days later, his friend, Alexander Scott, was also removed from the ministry, and that evening they walked home together. Scott recalls their conversation:

After that dreary night in the Assembly, the dawn breaking upon us as we returned, at length alike condemned, to our lodging in the New Town of Edinburgh, I turned around and looked on my companion's face under the pale light, and asked him, could you sign the Confession now? His answer was, "No. The Assembly was right. Our doctrine and the Confession were incompatible."<sup>116</sup>

Campbell was finally made to see clearly that his thinking had led him away from the teaching of the church. Surely he had not intended this. His analysis of Christian experience and reading of the Scripture in its light yielded an order of salvation different from that explicated in the standards. But it also provided him a foundation from which to probe even deeper into the realities and implications of the consciousness of being a child of God. Convinced of the universality of the atonement, he would move to consider its nature, still starting from the requirements of the desired experience. Perhaps his later work was in fulfillment of an unintentional observation overheard by Thomas Erskine:

Before the sentence of deposition was actually pronounced, some slight discussion as to the order of procedure took place. Dr. Macknight of Edinburgh, who held at the time the office of Chief Clerk of the Assembly, on being appealed to, in the height of his emotion, and meaning exactly the reverse of what he said, was heard to declare that "these doctrines of Mr. Campbell would remain and flourish after the Church of Scotland had perished, and was forgotten." Mr. Erskine, who was present, caught the words. Turning to those behind him, he whispered, "This spake he not of himself, but being High-Priest—he prophesied."<sup>117</sup>

<sup>116</sup> A[lexander] J[ohn] Scott, "A Letter to the Editor," *The Daily News*, 26 May 1862, quoted in J. Phillip Newell, "'Unworthy of the dignity of the Assembly': the deposition of Alexander John Scott in 1831," *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 21 (1983):257.

<sup>117</sup> Hanna, *Thomas Erskine*, 1:136–137.





## II

### Christian Experience and the Nature of the Atonement

#### CAMPBELL'S MIDDLE YEARS

John McLeod Campbell's deposition removed him from the ministry of the Church of Scotland, but it did not remove him from the pulpit. He preached the gospel indoors and out, on Sundays and weekdays, often to large crowds. Indeed, as his son writes, "The years which followed his deposition were the time of Mr. Campbell's greatest activity as a preacher."<sup>118</sup> This is important to recall. Campbell was preeminently a preacher. Today he is remembered primarily in connection with the infamy of his heresy trial (1831) and with the teaching of his major book, *The Nature of the Atonement and Its Relation to Remission of Sins and Eternal Life* (1856), after which his fame and acceptance grew. The twenty-five long years of obscurity between his deposition and his major publication were not years of idleness. Instead, they were years of such extensive exertion that Campbell suffered some periods of protracted illness. They were years that included marriage, children, travel, friendships, and bereavements. But most importantly for our purposes, they were years of faithful service and growth. For in this period Campbell not only stood by all that he had learned and taught at Row about the universal extent of the atonement, but he also gradually turned his attention, study, and teaching to that even more important issue, the nature of atonement. Through it all, he continued to follow the guiding light of Christian experience.

For this period of Campbell's life we must depend almost entirely upon his son, Donald, who summarizes the twenty-five years on two pages in *Reminiscences and Reflections* and at some greater length while introducing the rele-

<sup>118</sup> *Memorials*, 1:87.

vant chapters of letters included in the *Memorials*. From the time of his deposition in mid-1831 until the end of the next year, Campbell lived at Kilninver with his father. He did return to Row briefly and also preached at Greenock, where the attendance of six thousand hearers surely indicated the affection and esteem in which they still held him. From Kilninver he went forth and preached at Oban, Kerrara, Luing, Skye, Raasay, Inveraray, Strachur, Kames, Campsie, Irongray, Dumfries, Tormore, Sasaig, Knock, Isle Oronsay, Corry, Kyle, Breakish, Strathaird, Snizort, Kilmuir, Earles, Uig, Stinzel, Duntuilin, Mogstad, and Glendale, among other places. One elderly man expressed his sorrow for the condition of the church in having deposed Campbell and went on to say, "You never wished but to be tried by Scripture, and if they had done that they could not have cast you out." This is indicative of the warmth with which he was widely, though not universally, received.<sup>119</sup>

During the first week of 1833, Campbell began his work in Glasgow, preaching to and assuming the pastoral care of what gradually became a fixed congregation. There he remained, except for occasional interruptions due to illness, until the spring of 1859. His schedule included three sermons on Sunday and one on Monday night at Glasgow, Tuesday at Paisley, Friday night at Greenock, and alternating weeks at Port-Glasgow and Kilbarchan, that is, Glentyan. Through it all, he made no effort to form a sect and successfully resisted the efforts of his continuing good friend, Edward Irving, to recruit him for what was coming to be known popularly as the "Irvingite" church. Campbell was submitted to the further indignity of having the presbytery from which he was dismissed instruct all its pastors to read from their pulpits a pastoral admonition setting forth the dangers to their souls to which Campbell's hearers exposed themselves and further threatening such hearers with withholding the sacraments from them. Campbell's father said the admonition presented Campbell's teaching wrongly, so he refused to read it to the congregation or to act on the warning it contained; the presbytery sent someone else to Kilninver to read it.<sup>120</sup>

Correspondence with his father indicates that at this time Campbell still focused upon the issues of the extent of the atonement and of assurance. He still encountered in Glasgow the legalistic piety he found at Row, by which people's seeming zeal for works actually neutralized the message of free pardon. And he learned that occasional preaching is one thing, but that the pastoral care for those brought together by the preaching is quite another. Camp-

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 1:87-102.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 1:102-106; *Reminiscences*, pp. 40-41.

bell continued to insist that "it was in the light of God within that he was to be known and met," that is, that Christian faith was to be experienced.<sup>121</sup>

After a period of several months of illness and absence from preaching, Campbell began again in Glasgow in the autumn of 1836. In September 1837, a chapel for his congregation was opened on Blackfriars Street. Again his health failed, requiring another period of rest, which culminated in a trip to Paris with his brother, home from India after sixteen years. It was in London, on the way to Paris, that Campbell met Mr. Frederick Denison Maurice, this being the beginning of a long friendship. While in Paris, Dr. Thomas Chalmers was staying next door, so Campbell enjoyed renewing this acquaintance. During the same time, he met a man who had translated one of Campbell's sermons into French and Italian, so he was beginning to have an international audience. Upon his return to Scotland, he married Mary Campbell, of Kilninver, on 26 September 1838. In October, they took up residence in Glasgow and he resumed preaching. In July 1839, they had a son, Donald, so named after Campbell's father. In 1841, another son was named after his dear friend Thomas Erskine, but died in the same year. From these letters it seems that life at that time was full of death: death from disease, hunger, age, riot; death of children, parents, spouses, friends, neighbors. Bereavement was real, but comfort was sought and found in the confidence of the good intended by the gracious God. Suffering was understood as a trial of faith, and occasion for seeking to learn what good could be captured from the situation.<sup>122</sup>

Perhaps an even greater blow than the death of his son was that of his father, to whom he had been so closely attached, in 1843, at the age of eighty-six. His good friend Alexander "Sandy" J. Scott wrote that he shared his sorrow and that God was bidding them to take their fathers' places. Thomas Erskine considered the elder Mr. Campbell a patriarch, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, gathered to his fathers, and trusted that Campbell would "be brought into nearer experience of the Fatherhood of our Father in heaven." It was months before Campbell preached again, being both ill and grieving. He wrote:

. . . I have learned my *first great lesson* in the school of affliction, and known my first deep grief; and now, when I look back on the endeavours which I have been at many times called to make to comfort bereaved friends, it seems to me as if I had scarcely known what I was attempting—so much greater have I found the power of heart-rending separations than what I had conceived of them.

<sup>121</sup> *Memorials*, 1:108–128.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:129–165.



Yet, though I feel that I knew not before how deep the wounds were which I was trying to bind up, I feel, at the same time, that, had I known, I could have done no more to help my friends than what I did in leading their thoughts to the love of God in Jesus Christ; neither was more needful. I have found sorrow a stronger thing than I thought; but, blessed be God! I have found the consolations of His love stronger still; nor did I know as I now know what I was saying to others when I was urging upon them as mourners to look unto Jesus and be healed. Not that I yet know the love of Jesus, and its power to bind up the broken heart, but in measure; but that I know so much more of it than I did as to give me increased liberty in making mention of His name to those that mourn as the all-sufficient because it is the everlasting consolation. We *need* to be comforted with *everlasting* consolation because it is *death* that makes our tears to flow. My little boy said to me lately, when I was reading the twenty-third Psalm to him, "Papa, when other persons die, and then we die, and then we are all dead, then they cannot be taken from us any more." I felt it sweet that the thought of separation was thus obviously painful to him, and that the thought of a condition in which there would be no separation seemed pleasant to him. It was nature that spoke in him. We were intended for dwelling together. Sin has introduced separation; but our hearts are not reconciled to it; and surely it is a part of the goodness of the good news, "the Gospel," in which life and immortality are brought to light, that, while the first fruit of redemption, and the highest, is that we shall glorify God and enjoy him for ever, this also is its fruit that we shall eternally enjoy each other in him.<sup>123</sup>

All of this bears testimony that Campbell was closely attached to his father, from whom he learned much of the Father of us all.<sup>124</sup> As late as 1871, Campbell wrote, "For no mere creature-gift of the 'better Father' have I been so indebted and so grateful to Him as for the earthly father, whose being what he was filled that name with so much meaning for me."<sup>125</sup>

The year of his great loss was also the year of the great Disruption in the established Church of Scotland. Many have thought that Campbell's deposition from the ministry in 1831 set the stage for what was to follow. In 1834,

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 1:177-178. His grief continued throughout that and the next year, when he wrote that "... we did not come to this world to find pleasure: we came for education, moral and spiritual discipline; . . . For the end of our being is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever; and this continues to be the law of our being; . . . I also am in school—not yet at home" (ibid., 1:184, 186).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 1:166-186.

<sup>125</sup> *Reminiscences*, p. 41.

the Evangelicals dominated the General Assembly for the first time. Dissension over the church's relation to the state and the appointment of ministers increased. In 1843, the retiring moderator of the General Assembly, instead of calling the new Assembly to order, read a protest and led out the secession of about 190 ministers and elders, who were not a majority but who then constituted the first Assembly of the Free Church. All of the foreign missionaries joined them. Thomas Chalmers was the new church's leading force. Campbell, previously committed to avoiding party commitments, remained outside both the moderate Church of Scotland and the Evangelical Free Church.<sup>126</sup>

In 1845, Campbell again accompanied his brother to the continent, traveling through Belgium and up the Rhine. In Antwerp, he noted that Roman Catholic veneration of crucifixes differed little from Protestant fascination with verbal depictions of the sufferings of Christ; paint and words both make up images, and both result in little more than knowing Christ after the flesh. Upon his return, some attempt was made to induce him into the Church of England, its latitudinarianism prevailing enough to make that possible; Campbell declined. He continued to cherish the freedom of thought which his isolation permitted. In 1846, he made a longer tour than before, this time arriving at Rome. He recorded great pain in "association with the most fearful form of man's inhumanity to man" upon visiting the Colosseum. A more happy sensation was that of "the largeness of *this human family* of which I am one, and that God is the Father of the spirits of all flesh." His international experience enforced his belief in universal grace, the universal extent of the atonement.<sup>127</sup>

In 1847, sixteen years after his deposition and nine years before the publication of his major book, we find mention of Campbell's consideration of the *nature* of atonement. It comes with an observation that many are preaching the universality of the atonement.

There has been of late a great breaking up of the Calvinism of this country, and not only a preaching of the universality of the atonement, but a reaction against Calvinism, which, like all reactions, has tended to an

<sup>126</sup> J. H. S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 334–369; Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Church in Victorian Scotland, 1843–1874* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1978), pp. 1–39; James Hastings Nichols, *History of Christianity 1650–1950: Secularization of the West* (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1956), pp. 135–150; Alec Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution, 1789 to the Present Day* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1961, 1974), pp. 56–67; Josef L. Altholz, *The Churches in the Nineteenth Century* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), pp. 117–123.

<sup>127</sup> *Memorials*, 1:188–200.

opposite error; and more especially to much that is very superficial and even untrue on the subject of divine teaching and regeneration; while the recognition of the universality of the atonement has been unaccompanied by any more spiritual insight into its nature.<sup>128</sup>

But such preaching is no cause for great rejoicing for Campbell, since it is compounded with error. Moreover, while the universal extent of the atonement continues to be an important affirmation, the time has come to attempt to understand and articulate its spiritual nature.

I have . . . ventured to attempt to teach my people on the subject of the atonement. As respects the *extent* of the atonement—its bearing on the whole human race—the Calvinism of Scotland seems breaking up fast; but this in connection with teaching, which is not light but darkness as to its *nature*; and I feel that the word for this time, if it were uttered as to command attention, is a word supplying this great want. Of course, it is not possible to be in error as to this without injury to the whole system of thought on the subject of salvation.<sup>129</sup>

Just as Campbell earlier attempted to speak a word in season to the people of Row, now he sensed the need for a word on the nature of the atonement. Campbell was not a speculative theologian but a practical pastor and preacher.

It was during 1854 and 1855 that Campbell prepared for and wrote his book on the atonement. He did extensive background reading, wrote and rewrote the book, then divided it into chapters. Mr. Macmillan encouraged him in his work and published the book, saying, "If anything would help the Scotch Calvinists to come into a larger place, it would be such a book as this." Response to its publication in early 1856 was slow, because it was a demanding book that required much time to read. But it received a favorable review in the *Literary Churchman* of 8 March 1856. Dr. Tulloch, principal at St. Andrews and Professor of Divinity, commended the book to his class and lectured on it, which act of moral courage Campbell accepted as the first fruits of his own forgiving love to the Church of Scotland. After Campbell's death, Mr. R. H. Story of Rosneath had this to say of the book:

All books . . . that contain what are called theories or doctrines of the Atonement, must at some point or other fail; for they deal with that "mystery of godliness," which was itself the outward expression of a divine love which "passes all understanding"; but those who have, with the greatest reverence and keenest intelligence, studied the Christian doc-

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 1:203.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 1:207.

trines that deal with the great question of man's reconciliation to God, through Jesus Christ, are the first to acknowledge that in Dr. Campbell's book on the Atonement—his chief book—they have met with the most coherent, the most comprehensive, and the most exalted of all expositions of the atoning work of our Lord. Nowhere else do you find a more perfect candour and charity in dealing with an opponent's theories, a more anxious searching into all the conditions of an argument, a more intuitive perception of the divine counsel, a more sustained flight of pure religious thought and feeling.<sup>130</sup>

### THE GLASGOW SERMONS ON CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

The years following Campbell's deposition from the ministry were those of the greatest amount of his preaching of the gospel. With these sermons, we shall trace the development of his thought through this period.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Robert Herbert Story, *The Risen Christ: a Sermon Preached in Rosneath Church on the Lord's Day after the Death of John McLeod Campbell, D.D.* (Glasgow: James Maclehose, Publisher to the University; London: Hamilton, Adams and Co.; Cambridge: Macmillan and Co.; Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas; Dublin: W. H. Smith and Son, 1872), p. 24, quoted in *Memorials*, 1:261–262. For more about *The Nature of the Atonement*, see also *Memorials*, 1:260–305.

<sup>131</sup> We do not have many examples of his work. From Row, we have seventy-five lengthy sermons from a two-year period. For the twenty-five years in Glasgow, we have at most thirty-five pieces of sermons, some only three pages long. None of these is precisely dated.

These sermons were published in a single volume of several editions and titles. The first, *Fragments of Expositions of Scripture*, was published anonymously in 1843, in London. It includes nineteen selections. Comparison with later editions shows that at least two are definitely A. J. Scott's and eight are Campbell's. The remaining nine might be Campbell's; most of them are almost surely so, though some might belong to Thomas Erskine, as do others in the later editions. The anonymous "Introduction," preserved in later editions, indicates that more than one preacher is represented, but not how many. The book was recognized as Campbell's (*Memorials*, 2:339). Donald Macleod, *Memoir of Norman Mcleod, D.D.*, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1876), 1:275–276, credits the book to Campbell and Scott alone.

The "Introduction" claims that a week-to-week and year-to-year progression in teaching is discernible; it suggests, but does not assure, that the fragments are in chronological order; in later editions, at least two of the pieces have reversed positions, and various deletions and insertions have been made, suggesting that the order is not necessarily chronological. *Fragments of Expositions of Scripture* (London: J. Wright and Co., Aldine Chambers; Hamilton, Adams, and Co., Paternoster-Row; and J. Nisbet and Co., Berners-Street, 1843), pp. 1ff.

Outside the "Preface to the Third Edition," no mention or record of a second edition is found. I know neither the date of its publication nor its contents, though perhaps it was a reprint of the first.

A third, much revised, and enlarged edition was published in Edinburgh in 1861, anonymously, as *Fragments of Truth: Being the Exposition of Several Passages of Scripture*, 3d ed. (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1861).

The number of fragments has expanded from nineteen to thirty, even after nine of the originals have been dropped. Some of the pieces that have been retained exhibit minor changes. Six sermons from the Gospel according to John have been inserted among others already from John,



First, we can consider the sermons unique to the first edition of *Fragments of Exposition*. These nine are most in continuity with those of the Row period. Campbell continues to exhort his hearers to experience Christianity, to have a "personal experience" of Jesus' heart as the disciples had.<sup>132</sup> Of course, the foundation of such an exhortation could not possibly be personal election, but God's gracious purpose to all as revealed in Christ.<sup>133</sup> The content of this divine purpose, the goal toward which God in Christ works, is our regeneration, new birth, change, or conversion.<sup>134</sup> Campbell describes this as a changed heart.<sup>135</sup> As usual, he emphasizes that we are responsible for our use of God's gift and suggests that failure to appropriate it would frustrate the gracious purpose of God.<sup>136</sup> Thus Campbell's thought seems to set

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a pair on conscience have been added, four on reconciliation follow, and then a pair on conformity to the Son (*ibid.*, i–viii).

The most help is found in his son's "Prefatory Note to Fourth Edition." In this 1898 edition, twenty-six years after Campbell's death, Donald for the first time lifts the veil of anonymity. He identifies which two sermons were by Thomas Erskine of Linlathen and which two by A. J. Scott, the remaining twenty-six being by Campbell. He states explicitly that Campbell's sermons were from the time between his ministry in Row (which ended in 1831) and the writing of his books, and that the four sermons on reconciliation contain many elements of the teaching *later* expounded in *The Nature of the Atonement*. So even the sermons added in the 1861 edition were preached prior to 1856, and perhaps even prior to the publication of Campbell's first book in 1851 (*Fragments of Truth: Being the Expositions of Passages of Scripture Chiefly from the Teaching of John McLeod Campbell, D.D.*, with a Preface by his Son, 4th ed. [Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1898], "Prefatory Note to Fourth Edition," inserted without page numbers between the title page and the reprinted "Preface to the Third Edition," which begins on p. iii).

This gives us a way to group the sermons for study. Of the nineteen in the first edition, at most seventeen are Campbell's, from the years 1831 to 1843. Nine of these did not get carried into the 1861 edition; though a proposal was made for them to be included in a second series (*Fragments of Truth*, 3d ed., p. iii.), there is no indication that this was done. These can be treated first. Second, the eight sermons which were reprinted (one was divided, so that they appear as nine) are clearly identified as Campbell's and are illustrative of those pre-1843 sermons still thought relevant in 1861. Finally, the seventeen sermons added in 1861 can be treated by topical groupings. Though these may have been preached prior to 1843, it seems more likely that they were preached between 1843 and 1851, or perhaps 1856, during which years his thoughts were turning increasingly to the analysis and explication of the nature of the atonement.

<sup>132</sup> *Fragments of Exposition*, p. 147.

<sup>133</sup> "The purpose which can be understood by looking at Christ must be a purpose for humanity; it cannot possibly reveal anything as to individuals. It is the divine idea concerning humanity—the gracious purpose of God, as to what He would have man to be" (*ibid.*, p. 170).

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>135</sup> "The essence of the change is always the same,—the production of a meek and quiet spirit, a circumcised heart, a subdued will; and the power is always the same,—the still small voice, addressing the inmost centre of the soul, where no violence or tumult can exist" (*ibid.*, p. 204).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 187, 208.

aside the efficacy of God's grace. Yet, he talks of the power to transform.<sup>137</sup> His conclusions sound familiar themes: the character of God as love and the manifestation of that to all; Christ is the light of all; God is to be worshipped in Spirit and in truth.<sup>138</sup> Finally, while all of these sermons are expositions of biblical texts and ostensibly based on the authority of the Scriptures, we find again an appeal to the authority of conscience as a way of knowing god which goes beyond the letter of Scripture.

I have seen a man afraid to do right, to do what his own conscience testified to as right, because he could not remember a text that authorized the act; but outward laws do not form the essence of Christianity. If we are acting in the *spirit* of the Gospel, it matters not whether we find a text to warrant the external action or not; the delight in the law of God is there.<sup>139</sup>

So Christian experience not only affects the reading of the Bible but can guide one's decisions in situations where no text applies.

Second, eight pre-1843 sermons were kept in the 1861 edition of *Fragments of Truth: Being the Exposition of Several Passage of Scripture*. One sermon was divided, making nine. The first, entitled "The Gospel" and based on Lk. 2:10–11, moves directly from providing background for the text to the insistence that Christianity is experiential.<sup>140</sup> Where there is no personal experience, no changed life, there is no Christianity. Then the text is summarized, the observation made that Jesus Christ was born a human brother to all humans, and the conclusion drawn that there is nothing we can do or need to do to draw ourselves into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus is already in a relationship with all of us; Christ is our brother. That has priority. It eliminates all need for striving. Again, the basis for the appeal to Christian experience is the affirmation of the universal extent of God's favor toward humanity.<sup>141</sup>

This pattern recurs. The doctrine of election, characterized as "an arbitrary

<sup>137</sup> "The excellence of Christianity does not consist in the inculcation of a higher morality than men were before possessed of, but in the revelation of a power by which to attain to that higher morality. It does not merely exhort to transformation; it brings the means of effecting it, by revealing life beyond death—a life to be obtained only through death" (ibid., p. 220).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., pp. 281–284.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>140</sup> "I entreat you to examine yourselves; to remember that this is a personal matter; and to consider whether you have proved it in your own experience" *Fragments of Truth*, 3d ed., p. 2).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., pp. 3–8.

exercise of choice on God's part," is flatly rejected.<sup>142</sup> In the place of this system, Campbell insists that there is "a witness of God in men's hearts, which is not arbitrarily confined to some, but given to all." This means that "real religion" must be experienced in the heart. It also means that while God has given everyone everything that is indispensable to salvation, each person has the "responsibility" of acting upon that gift.<sup>143</sup> Again, the nature or the fullness of that gift must be questioned, or the efficacy of God's grace questioned, since there remains some response that humans must add to it to claim salvation.

Though Campbell is almost entirely focused upon individual Christian experience, he does realize that salvation has larger dimensions. Not only is a person changed inwardly, but also that person is changed in relation to others. "The effect of Christianity is to introduce new relationships amongst men. Not only to purify and exalt the old relationships, and to bring glory to God through them, but to reveal new relationships of a higher order."<sup>144</sup> This is hardly a program for the transformation of society at large. Campbell is speaking here of relationships among Christians, of life within the church. Yet it does include the recognition that Christianity is not only personal but also interpersonal. It does mean that grace and faith change not only individuals but also groups.

Campbell understands humans to relate to God through the exercise of free will. This is at variance with the Protestant and Reformed understanding of the bondage of the will, which says that one is not free to will the good in regard to salvation. Such a limitation emphasizes divine initiative, the prevenience of grace, and the efficacy of grace, succinctly expressed in the phrase "grace alone." Campbell's emphases differ. He focuses upon the ability of the human to respond to God's grace, and he does so in such a way as to indicate that the response qualifies the grace. The Reformers knew about human response and its importance, such as in grace engendering gratitude, but that was an after-the-fact response that did not affect the prior grace. For Campbell, who teaches universal grace but limited salvation, the human appropriation of grace determines the effectiveness of that grace and, consequently,

<sup>142</sup> "Such a system must necessarily destroy all true sense of responsibility, inasmuch as it destroys all confidence in God's character as a righteous and loving Being. We feel that it would be unreasonable to blame a blind man for not seeing, or a deaf man for not hearing. How then has it come to pass that this simple sense of justice has not saved us from the notion, that in another and unspeakably more important matter, God *does* blame men for a blindness which they can neither avoid nor remedy?" (ibid., pp. 110, 111).

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., pp. 119–122.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

one's eternal fate. Campbell does not presume that anyone can initiate his or her own salvation, or would need to, because forgiveness has already been extended to all; but God does not act unilaterally and the individual must complete what has begun. Such responsibility for salvation requires the possession of free will. For Campbell, regeneration is "in some sense dependent on the choice and will of the creature," which will "may either resist or cooperate with the will of God, which would have all men saved." New life is a gift which humans do not originate, but to which they are called to yield, a life they are called to choose. Because this new life has been given, every individual is under the responsibility to be born again, and God righteously demands regeneration. God holds us to himself, not by force, but by the attraction which is beauty and excellence exercise on our free will.<sup>145</sup>

This emphasis upon the exercise of the free will in salvation opens the question of the legitimacy of self-interest. Selfishness is something from which faith in God is supposed to deliver us.<sup>146</sup>

But, in condemning self-love, we must take care not to condemn that which God Himself has implanted in our constitution. Seeking good for ourselves is not wrong; God would have us cherish our own welfare; He cares for us, He interests Himself in our happiness, and it cannot be according to His will that we should be indifferent to it ourselves. . . .

That which is evil is *self seeking its gratification in a wrong thing*,—robbing God and man by setting itself up as independent.<sup>147</sup>

The appeal to legitimate self-interest is a dangerous one. How, in this fallen world, can a sinful self distinguish which of its interests are legitimate and which are not? Indeed, why should a sinful self be concerned about legitimacy, or how could it be? If the sinful self were able to discern legitimate self-interest and, particularly, choose the good in regard to salvation, the human predicament would not seem to be terribly severe. But if the self becomes through sin incapable of willing the good in regard to salvation, so that all of its self-interest becomes misguided and illegitimate, so that the self does not seek to praise God but to elevate self, does that not more accurately describe the depths of human sinfulness and the seriousness of the human situation? If we could act in legitimately self-interested ways, what would be the need of Christ? The illegitimacy of all we seek and all our seeking, made obvious only in forgiveness in Christ, demonstrates the severity of sin and the

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., pp. 133–151.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 137.



need for salvation effected by an agent outside the self. Campbell's notion of responsibility fails to account for this.

Again, in this group of sermons, Campbell bases his thought upon the Bible, but as interpreted through the higher, self-legitimizing perspective of Christian experience. On the one hand, the Bible is interpreted very literally and used in a pre-critical fashion. He understands Jesus' prayer in the seventeenth chapter of John not as an expression of the theology of its author but as "the breathings of the Saviour's heart . . . and the whole desires of his soul."<sup>148</sup> But on the other hand, the grounds for Campbell's confident approach to the Scriptures are not constituted of simply biblicism. Such confidence springs from the congruity of the biblical witness to the inner leadings of the Spirit. There are things that can only be taught inwardly. "God reveals them *by His Spirit* to *our spirit*. In true religion, therefore, we must be *personally* under God's teaching,—other things we may learn from the teaching of man, in this we can be taught by the Spirit of God alone."<sup>149</sup> The demand for an infallible authority is met neither by the Roman Catholic appeal to the authority of the church or the pope nor by the subjectivity of individual Protestant interpretation of the Bible. Instead, it is met only by the inner teachings of God, which have a self-evidencing quality about them.

. . . a man may arrive at certainty, not through leaning on his own understanding, but through apprehending and believing the voice of God within his own spirit. . . .

We speak the truth, and lie not, when we say that we know with more certainty what we know of Christ, when thus taught by the Spirit, than we know anything else whatever. When God teaches us, and we know His voice, then we have a ground of confidence which nothing in time or eternity can shake.

Do you ask how can we know that it is His voice? I answer, because "in His light we see light." He brings home to our consciences as well as to our understandings, the truths in which he instructs us; they do not remain on the outside of us, as speculative truth received from man so often does. We do not hold them in blind submission to authority, but because He has taught us to apprehend their excellence and truth.<sup>150</sup>

Without such inner teaching, study of the Bible would be fruitless. The Bible presupposes an inner receptivity, so that the study of Scripture involves not

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., pp. 115, 116.

so much a critical examination of the text as a spiritual exercise of discernment of the will of God, of hearing the word of God, or of seeing the meaning of God's teachings.<sup>151</sup> What God testifies to in the heart remains the standard against which all else must be judged.<sup>152</sup>

Third, the group of sermons added to the third edition and presumably coming from the years between 1843 and 1851, may be taken up. The sermons from John are almost totally about Christian experience, especially the experience of knowing Christ and loving one another. Christ, the Mediator between God and humanity, provides the only access to God and, for that matter, the only access to true humanity.

... we are to look to Jesus, not so much to know what He is in Himself as man, as to know, by contemplating Him, what God is. But, in truth, the two are one. Jesus in one aspect is *God toward man*; if we would know what God is, we must look at him; in another aspect He is *man toward God*; if we would know what humanity is—what God created man to be—we must look at Him. He is at once the true and full revelation of God, and the manifestation of man as God intends man to be. He is the Mediator because of this oneness. We draw near to God when we come to Him in the mind of Christ, because it is God's own mind in humanity.<sup>153</sup>

Of course, our present experience of Christ is spiritual and not physical, but

<sup>151</sup> "I find that in the Scriptures words are *not* explained;—they are *used*. The Bible . . . takes it for granted that there is something within the man which knows the meaning. If you recollect this while reading the Scriptures, you will see how continually the existence of this inward witness is implied. To explain such expressions, I should be obliged to use other words which convey to my mind the same idea; but if the idea is not in your mind, these different forms of expressing it cannot make it clear to you; it is like bidding you look out, first at one window, and then at another, and a third, for a thing which can be seen alike from all. The thing needed is to have the eye opened that can discern the teaching of God" (ibid., pp. 135–136).

<sup>152</sup> "... except so far as this witness is heard, the Bible itself must go for nothing. There is an idolatry of the letter of the Bible, or rather of man's notions of that letter, which keeps people from *proving* the truth, and which is quite different from receiving and reverencing it as the word of the living God. A man quotes a text, and calls on his opponent to submit to the authority of Scripture; but how often it is only those texts which seem to go along with the tide of feeling in his own mind which he so reverences; while something *within* is his real living authority. If a text be advanced which bears an apparently opposite meaning, it makes very little impression; and I have often been struck with the little weight, on minds of this stamp, of such simple practical words as admit of no dispute; such as "Love your enemies," "Resist not evil," "Forgive, until seventy times seven." We may silence such a reasoner by bringing forward opposite texts, we may shut his mouth with the most convincing arguments; but when all is done, his mind will be like a wand, which, though held forcibly in an unnatural position for a time, springs back to its own bent whenever the pressure is removed. There must be something revealed in his heart and yielded to, or truth addressed to him from without will be of no avail" (ibid., pp. 154–155).

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., pp. 103, 104.

it is entirely real nonetheless. Moreover, our present spiritual experience of Christ forms the basis for mutual love and forgiveness.<sup>154</sup>

The sermons on conscience continue Campbell's emphasis on Christian experience, making explicit claims about the conscience being the locus of that experience and about the experience of forgiveness and renewal of the heart having a higher authority than the mere words of the Bible.

. . . I do not ask you merely to *bow* to the authority of St. Paul or of Scripture in this matter. . . . You need to have *your own* conscience purged; you need the *actual experience* of the cleansing efficacy of Christ's blood; the knowledge is precious, because without it Christ cannot be to *you* a present Saviour; your belief of the doctrine must be such as to enable you to use it.<sup>155</sup>

Campbell's four sermons on reconciliation, based on 2 Co. 5:17–21, contain many elements of the teaching later expounded in *The Nature of the Atonement*. Of first importance is the realization that atonement was effected not by the physical suffering and death of Christ as such but by Christ's spiritual act, that is, by his unfailing obedience to God, even unto death on the cross. That is, the atonement is spiritual and moral in nature.

The voluntary shedding of His blood indicated the entire surrender of His will by the Son to the Father. It was this *doing of the will of God* that made the sacrifice a reality; it was this which constituted the essence of the atonement.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>154</sup> "Perhaps you suppose that because Jesus has gone to the Father and we see Him no more, therefore we can have no such personal experience of His love as the disciples had; but is not this to lose sight of our Lord's own assurance that it was expedient for them that He should go away, otherwise the Comforter would not come unto them. If Christ were indeed farther from us than He was from His disciples while present with them in the body, we should be under a disadvantage; but if we may through partaking of His Spirit be nearer to Him than any bodily presence could make us, then we may have the daily experience of His Love as really, as personally as they had. If we are not abiding in this personal experience of the Love of Christ—if we are not experiencing His living Love, in its tenderness, in its purity, in its severe and searching holiness—if we know it not, seeking to bless us, by turning us from iniquity, yet never encouraging or sparing us in evil, we shall not know how to deal with our brethren in true love.

"It is not by admiring at a distance Christ's Love to us, that we can have His Love kindled in our own hearts; . . .

"If then we would learn to love one another, we must learn how Jesus is in the midst of us, even to the end of the world; . . .

"There is a great difference between a general belief in Christ as Saviour, and His being known in our hearts by His actual dealing with ourselves. . . . Those who dwell in Christ *give what they get*. The sense of their need of Christ's forbearance, and their daily experience of that forbearance, makes them tender toward others" (ibid., pp. 68–70).

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., pp. 177–178.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

Just as the earlier sermons at Row drew upon the doctrine that God is love to reach the conclusion that the atonement is universal in extent, so do these sermons use the knowledge that God is love to come into a greater understanding of the nature of Christ's atoning work. Campbell delineates four elements in the atonement: Christ's declaration that he came to do the will of God; the work of Christ that gained its virtue and efficacy to take away in by actually being the will of God done; the demonstration that this particular will of God done is not merely a simple commandment but actually the most perfect embodiment of the Divine character; and the realization that this will of God is love.<sup>157</sup>

One of the major emphases of these sermons is his insistence that the work of Christ for us makes a real difference in our lives. As we have seen all along, Christian experience stands at the heart of Campbell's thought and teaching. These sermons further emphasize the importance of Christian experience, of the changes Christ works in our lives. This expressly means more than the non-imputation of sin, for Campbell asserts that Christ effects "a real actual change of moral condition" and "a real change of spirit." It is not simply that the work of Christ causes people to be reckoned righteous but that it actually makes people righteous. Justification and sanctification, admittedly frequently distinguished, are here held closely together.<sup>158</sup>

Finally, some sermons treat the Christian experience of conformity with Christ:

Are we not all conscious that there are in ourselves and in those around us many undefined thoughts and feelings—cravings after a good the nature of which we hardly know—dissatisfiedness with outward things—heavings and workings of the Spirit of the Son which are of the very nature of love, even in hearts as to which we cannot venture to say that there is in them any distinct knowledge of God, or any decided choosing of the things of God. *We may quench them*; I beseech you take heed lest you do so; for all true religion has its root in such cravings, and if you yield to them—if you resist the selfish life which strives against them, they will issue in the development of the spirit of sonship—yea, in perfect conformity to the image of the Son.<sup>159</sup>

From the first sermon to the last, these sermons exude Campbell's urgency about Christian experience. Remembering the past is not enough. Anticipating the future is not enough. Speculating about doctrine is not enough. Chris-

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., pp. 242, 243.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., pp. 225–227.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., pp. 259–260.



tianity is the present experience of God as Love, of Christ as Savior, and of the Spirit as Comforter, or it is nothing. God has acted in Christ to forgive us. We are free to respond. The intention is for us to become Christ-like. The atonement, at first seen to be universal in extent, is now seen to be moral and spiritual in its nature. This comes as a gift, yet as one for which we are responsible. We are expected to enter into and share the moral and spiritual change.

### THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT

*The Nature of the Atonement* is John McLeod Campbell's most important writing and the major concern of this study. Many have considered it Scotland's greatest contribution to Christian theology. Campbell himself emphasizes the magnitude of the subject by insisting that "the question as to the nature of the atonement is in truth nothing else than the question 'what is Christianity?'"<sup>160</sup> The answer he gives not only constitutes the fruition of all his prior preaching, teaching, and pastoral work, but also demonstrates that his understanding of Christian experience is central to his thought.

Campbell's son, Donald, quotes this sentence as the "main thesis" of the book: "It was the spiritual essence and nature of the sufferings of Christ, and not that these sufferings were penal, which constituted their value as entering into the atonement made by the Son of God, when He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."<sup>161</sup> This provides a fair representation of Campbell's insight into the atonement. But I contend that the motive and driving force behind his argument are found in this statement about Christ's atoning work:

We see further that what is thus offered on our behalf is so offered by the Son and so accepted by the Father, *entirely with the prospective purpose that it is to be reproduced in us*. . . .

. . . We soon are thankful that what God has *accepted* for us in Christ, is also what God has *given* to us in Christ.<sup>162</sup>

That is, the experience of being a child of God is the entire purpose of the atonement. The atonement is precisely that which is spiritually and morally necessary to bring us to that experience and consciousness. Thus, the analysis of this consciousness of being a child of God is the foundation upon which Campbell's conceptualization of the atonement rests. Campbell understands God to be working in Christ with the purpose of changing persons from the

<sup>160</sup> John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement and Its Relation to Remission of Sins and Eternal Life*, 6th ed. (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1886, reprinted 1895), p. 316.

<sup>161</sup> *Memorials*, 1:260-261, quoting *Atonement*, p. 102.

<sup>162</sup> *Atonement*, p. 153, emphasis added.

state of not knowing that they are children of God to one of being conscious that they are children of God, and this transformation is the basic Christian experience. Campbell's understanding of Christian experience led to his theory of the atonement.

In his description of the atonement, Campbell shifts away from the legal and forensic metaphors of older theologies to use personal categories to speak of God, Christ, humanity, and their relations. Indeed, he understands the atonement to have nothing to do with external legal arrangements and everything to do with internal transformation. Campbell's turn toward interiority and the personal are clear from the opening pages of *The Nature of the Atonement*, where he emphasizes the role of Christian experience.

The internal evidence of Christianity all prize, and anything felt to be a real addition to it all must welcome. . . . As the divine life is developed in us, these two things proceed happily together, viz., a growing capacity of judging what the conditions are of a peace with God in full harmony with His name and character; and the apprehension of these conditions as all present in the atonement. . . .

In this view the internal evidence of the atonement ought to be the securest stronghold of Christianity.<sup>163</sup>

Here is the note of personal change and development, in relation to God, brought about by the atonement.

It might be objected that Campbell, in his emphasis upon this subjective aspect of the atonement, fails to do justice to the objective accomplishment of Christ in the atonement. If this were the case, it would seriously undermine the validity of his account of the atonement. But the objections do not hold. Campbell does not understand the atonement as being only exemplary. He insists that there is an objective accomplishment in the costly work of the atonement, without which the work would be ridiculous and the subjective aspects of the atonement would be futile.

Love cannot be conceived of as doing anything gratuitously, merely to show its own depth, for which thing there was no call in the circumstances of the case viewed in themselves. A man may love another so as to be willing to die for him;—but he will not actually lay down his life merely to show his love, and without there being anything to render his doing so necessary in order to save the life for which he yields up his own.

Therefore the question remains, "How was so costly an expression of love as the atonement necessary?" . . . Self-sacrificing love does not

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., pp. 3, 5.

sacrifice itself but for an end of gain to its object; otherwise it would be folly.<sup>164</sup>

Campbell explores Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*, where he finds much with which he agrees about the doctrine of justification by faith. Then, skipping over Calvin, he examines several Calvinists, with whom he disagrees about the doctrine of the atonement, since they conceive of it in purely legal terms. Campbell seeks a fuller apprehension of the doctrine of the atonement. Still holding as valid his earlier insistence upon the universality of the atonement in regard to the question of its extent, he now turns to the question of its nature. Campbell argues that any legal, forensic, or penal theory grossly misrepresents its nature and must be cast aside. Any theory that understands justice as God's first and highest attribute invariably and unavoidably distorts the conception of God's love, making it secondary and subservient to justice. Campbell reverses this order. For him, God's love must be first and foremost. Any understanding of justice must be such that it serves the higher attribute of love. Another way of saying this is that God is not Judge first and Father second, but rather is Father first and always, and Judge only to the extent that it serves and is allowed by fatherliness.

This shift of emphasis upon divine attributes involves Campbell in a shift from the forensic categories of previous accounts of the atonement, especially in the Reformed tradition, to personal categories. Of course, the categories are not new. They can be found in the Bible and in Calvin, with whom Campbell chooses not to deal. But Campbell emphasizes them differently than before, at least recently, in his tradition. The major reason for the shift is Campbell's conception of Christian experience. He understands the experience of a Christian not to be the consciousness of a criminal whose debt had been paid by another, but the consciousness of a child of God who has been led from his or her erring ways by his or her elder brother Christ into the enjoyment of being a child of God. It is this conception of Christian experience that leads Campbell to reconceptualize the work of God in Christ in the atonement and to reconsider the very understanding of God.

As indicated in the full title *The Nature of the Atonement and Its Relation to Remission of Sins and Eternal Life*, Campbell divides the work of Christ in the atonement temporally between its "retrospective aspect" of the remission of sins and its "prospective aspect" of the gift of eternal life, which is the Christian experience of being a child of God. The explication is further divided relationally into considerations of the work of Christ toward humanity on behalf of

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., pp. 22, 23.

God and of the work of Christ toward God on behalf of humanity. The resulting fourfold understanding of the atonement can be summarized as Christ's agreement with God's "condemnation" of the sinfulness of humanity, his "perfect confession" in humanity of that sinfulness to God, his "witnessing" to humanity of its true status before God, and his "intercession" to God on behalf of humanity. Campbell insists that no one of these alone constitutes the atonement and that all four of them must be taken together. Indeed, he argues that Christ's fourfold work of the atonement was not only a natural development of the incarnation, as understood in classical Christological doctrine, but actually a necessary development of the incarnation.<sup>165</sup>

To grasp Campbell's understanding, we must listen to his own words. First, there is the retrospective work of God toward humanity in Christ's agreement with God's condemnation of sin.

. . . we shall have no difficulty in seeing the place which the perfect zeal for the Father's honour, the living manifestation of perfect sympathy in the Father's condemnation of sin, the perfect vindication of the unselfish and righteous character of that condemnation as the mind of Him who is love, which were presented to men in the life of Christ, being perfected in His death,—we shall, I say, have no difficulty in seeing the place which this dealing of Christ with men on the part of God has in the work of redemption.<sup>166</sup>

The second part, Campbell's account of Christ's confession in humanity to God, includes his most celebrated phrase, emphasized below. But it must be remembered that this is only one of the four parts of his description of the atonement.

That oneness of mind with the Father, which towards man took the form of condemnation of sin, would in the Son's dealing with the Father in relation to our sins, take the form of a perfect confession of our sins. This confession, as to its own nature, must have been *a perfect Amen in humanity to the judgment of God on the sin of man*. Such an Amen was due in the truth of things. He who was the Truth could not be in humanity and not utter it,—and it was necessarily a first step in dealing with the Father on our behalf. . . . He who so responds to the divine wrath against sin, saying, "Thou are righteous, O Lord, who judgest so," is necessarily receiving the full apprehension and realisation of that wrath, as well as of that sin against which it comes forth into His soul and spirit, into the bosom of the divine humanity, and, so receiving it, He re-

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., pp. xvi, 119, 122, 198.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., pp. 113–114.



sponds to it with a perfect response,—a response from the depths of that divine humanity,—and *in that perfect response He absorbs it*. For that response has all the elements of a perfect repentance in humanity for all the sin of man,—a perfect sorrow—a perfect contrition—all the elements of such a repentance, and that in absolute perfection, all—excepting the personal consciousness of sin;—and by that perfect response in Amen to the mind of God in relation to sin is the wrath of God rightly met, and that is accorded to divine justice which is its due, and could alone satisfy it.<sup>167</sup>

Taken together, Christ's divine condemnation of sin and human confession of sin constitute the retrospective aspect of his work of atonement, that portion of the atonement which brings about the remission of sins. Many theories of the atonement have been content to stop at this point, or to concentrate the majority of their attention upon this aspect of the atonement, as if the forgiveness of sin made up the whole of salvation. But for Campbell it is only the beginning. He turns his attention to the future, the goal of eternal life, the purpose of the atonement in arriving at the consciousness of being a child of God, for which goal the remission of sin is the necessary preliminary.

The prospective and forward-looking aspect of the atonement, in Campbell's understanding, begins with Christ's witness from God to humanity, this being the third of the four components.

. . . He who is the revealer of God to man is also the revealer of man to himself. Apart from Christ we know not our God, and apart from Christ we know not ourselves: . . . Not for His own sake but for our sakes did the Son of God reveal the hidden capacity of good that is in many by putting forth in humanity the power of the law of the Spirit of His own life—the life of sonship. . . .

. . . Let us think of Christ as the Son who reveals the Father, that we may know the Father's heart against which we have sinned, that we may see how sin, in making us godless, has made us as orphans, and understand that the grace of God, which is at once the remission of past sin, and the gift of eternal life, restores to our orphan spirits their Father and to the Father of spirits His lost children.<sup>168</sup>

Thus in acting on behalf of God toward us, Christ not only looks back and agrees with God's condemnation of our sin, but he also looks ahead and bears witness to us of our true status as children of God. Christ reveals that God

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., pp. 116–118.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., pp. 144, 145, 147–148.

is our Father and that we are God's children. This has nothing to do with our legal standing in a court of law. It has everything to do with personal relations.

In the fourth place, Campbell argues that Christ's dealing with the Father on our behalf, in its prospective aspect, consists of intercession.

What we have thought of Christ as necessarily desiring for us, was the fellowship of what He Himself was in humanity. This, therefore, was that which He would ask for us; and we can now understand that He would do so with a confidence connected with His own consciousness that *in humanity* He abode in His Father's love and in the light of His countenance. Thus would His own righteousness be presented along with the confession of our sins when He asked for us remission of sins and eternal life.<sup>169</sup>

This prayer of Christ, our elder brother, as a human to God on our behalf, this prayer that we be granted the gift of eternal life, the consciousness that we are children of God and thus brothers and sisters to Christ, constitutes the fourth and final part of what Campbell understands and describes the atonement to be. Again, we cannot stress enough that no one of these components—condemnation, confession, witness, and intercession—alone can be construed to make up the work of atonement. All four belong together as a whole.

The entire significance of Campbell's understanding of the atonement in these personal categories, as a natural development of the incarnation, is that the atonement has a spiritual and moral power to transform us as persons. The entire purpose of the atonement is that it is to be reproduced in us. What Christ experienced, we are to experience.

The expiatory confession of our sins which we have been contemplating is to be shared in by ourselves: to accept it on our behalf was to accept it as that mind in relation to sin in the fellowship of which we are to come to God. The righteous trust in the Father, that following Him as a dear child walking in love which we have been contemplating as Christ's righteousness, is to be shared in by us: to accept it on our behalf as the righteousness of man, was to accept it as what pleases God in man,—what alone can please God in man,—therefore as that in the fellowship of which we are to draw near and live that life which is in God's favor. . . .

. . . In the faith of God's acceptance of that confession on our behalf, we receive strength to say Amen to it,—to join in it—and, joining in it,

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

we find it a living way to God; and at the same time we feel certain that there is no other way,—that we get near to God just in the measure in which in the Spirit of Christ we thus livingly adopt His confession of our sins,—in this measure and no further.<sup>170</sup>

This obviously has nothing to do with arbitrary, legalistic arrangements that are external to the self. It has to do with the patterning of ourselves after Christ, particularly in his filial relation to God. And yet, the atonement as Campbell understands it is not only exemplary. Instead, he understands it to have a self-evidencing quality about it, a capability to appeal to us authoritatively, a power to accomplish that which it purposes.

*This movement in our inner being—this moulding of us to itself—the atonement, apprehended by a true and living faith, necessarily accomplishes; and its tendency to secure this result, is one element in our faith, when we first believe; as also the experience of this power in it is the great subsequent strengthening of our faith. . . . deep certainty . . . belongs to the view of the atonement, according to which our trust in it is necessarily fellowship in it—that fellowship a light in which the sure grounds of our trust are ever more and more clearly seen. For this character can only belong to an atonement whose nature admits of its reproduction in us, so that its elements become matter of consciousness to ourselves.*<sup>171</sup>

Campbell's theory of the atonement then has to do with the loving work of God the Father in Jesus Christ the Son, our perfect Elder Brother, this work being not of a penal character but of a spiritual and moral nature, with its purpose being the generation in persons of the consciousness of being children of God. In this theology the atonement refers to the future; its goal lies before it. Campbell thinks that although most theories of the atonement vaguely acknowledge this they mainly focus their attention backwards, seeing atonement primarily as the payment for past guilt, and thus by omission distort their overall understandings. But for Campbell, the atonement has even more to do with serving a future goal than with correcting a past mistake.

We have seen that Campbell objects to reducing the understanding of the atonement to either its objective or its subjective side alone. His own theory of the atonement accounts for them both. Indeed, it is precisely the objective accomplishment, the remission of sin and the gift of eternal life, that makes possible and calls forth a subjective response to it, a personal appropriation of the atonement and participation in the eternal life of being a child of God.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., pp. 153, 156–157.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., pp. 287–288, emphasis added.

It is the work of Christ that provides what is spiritually and morally necessary to effect the transformation of the self.

For faith, in trusting God, does so in response to that mind of God in relation to man which is revealed to us in our being embraced in Christ's expiatory confession of our sins, when by the grace of God, He tasted death for every man, and in that perfect righteousness of sonship in humanity which Christ presented to the father on behalf of all humanity as the true righteousness of man, and, which, in raising Him from the dead, the Father has sealed to us as our true righteousness. This gracious mind of God in relation to us it is that our faith accepts and responds to; for our faith is, in truth, the Amen of our individual spirits to that deep, multiform, all-embracing, harmonious Amen of humanity, in the person of the Son of God, to the mind and heart of the Father in relation to man,—the divine wrath and the divine mercy, which is the atonement. . . . The Amen of the individual human spirit to the Amen of the Son to the mind of the Father in relation to man, is saving faith—true righteousness; being the living action, and true and right movement of the spirit of the individual man in the light of eternal life. And the certainty that God has accepted that perfect and divine Amen as uttered by Christ in humanity is necessarily accompanied by the peaceful assurance that in uttering, in whatever feebleness, a true Amen to that high Amen, the individual who is yielding himself to the spirit of Christ to have it uttered in him is accepted of God. . . . This Amen is sonship . . . In the light itself of that Amen to the mind of the Father in relation to man which shines to us in the atonement, we see the *righteousness of God in accepting the atonement*, and in that same light the Amen of the individual human spirit to that divine Amen of the Son of God, is seen to be what the divine righteousness will necessarily acknowledge as the *end of the atonement accomplished*.<sup>172</sup>

Campbell insists that by the revelation in Christ of both God and humanity, we are always to understand God as the Father of our spirits, Christ as the Son of God and our elder brother—"the perfect elder brother, [who,] unlike the elder brother in the parable, sympathised in all the yearnings of the Father's heart over His prodigal brethren"<sup>173</sup>—and ourselves as the children of God, which is our eternal life. Legal language is discarded in favor of a personal conception of God in a familial relation with humanity.

We have here to do with PERSONS,—the Father of spirits and His offspring. *These are to each other more than all things and all circumstances.*

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., pp. 194, 195.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 108.



We know that the desire of the Father's heart is toward His offspring,—that it goes forth to them directly,—that it is not a simple mercy pitying their misery,—that it seeks to possess them as dear children. We know that to be restored to Him, and to possess Him as their Father, is to these alienated children themselves not merely a great thing, but every thing. He, the Father, has done all towards their reconciliation in perfect fatherliness, and all the provisions of His love have been dictated, and have had their character determined by His fatherliness. They therefore must hear nothing, be occupied with nothing, but what pertains to their character as His offspring.<sup>174</sup>

Campbell uses not only personal images but also familial images and examples to aid our understanding of the work of Christ in the atonement.

Any father who has ever been privileged to have one child pleading for forgiveness to another child for an offence which has been unkindness to the interceding child himself has here some help to his faith in his own experience.<sup>175</sup>

Although Campbell remains primarily interested in the individual Christian experience of the remission of sins and the gift of eternal life, we must admit that he is not entirely individualistic. These familial images of the atonement at least hint at, even if they do not develop, the relatedness of the self not only to God and Christ but to the whole of humanity. Later, this is explicitly stated and developed.

With this, the heart of the matter has been explicated. Campbell understands the atonement to be of such a nature as to provide what is spiritually and morally necessary to effect the transformation from a pre-Christian consciousness of being an orphan, or a lost and wandering child, to a Christian awareness of being a child of God and a younger brother or sister to Christ. Working back from this, Campbell analyzes the work of Christ in the atonement into four distinct though inseparable components. These he casts in language using personal categories, not legal terms. The entire significance of Christ's work in the atonement has to do with the effect that it produces upon us, that it should be reproduced in us. This heart of Campbell's work is preceded by his treatment of other theories of the atonement. It is followed—not preceded, but followed—by his examination of the biblical account of the life and death of Jesus Christ. What Campbell finds there is that Jesus' death was not different from his life, for in both Jesus participated in the fourfold work of atonement: condemnation, confession, witness, and intercession. Previous

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., pp. 183–184.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., pp. 201–202.

theories, especially penal and forensic ones, had concentrated upon Christ's death, seeing it as satisfactory substitutionary suffering, the reception of the wrath of God the judge for all of humanity poured upon a single person in a single moment. But what Campbell sees in Christ's death is that he continues to maintain, under the most extreme of circumstances, what he had exhibited throughout his life: love of God and neighbor. Christ consistently loved us with the love of God and showed us how to love God and one another, even under the most extreme and final trial of death. It is significant that Campbell does not begin with such an exposition of biblical texts and then move to the construction of a theory of the atonement. Instead, he begins with an analysis of Christian experience, the consciousness of being a child of God, works back from that to what would be spiritually and morally necessary to produce such a consciousness, and only then turns to the scripture to find what he calls "illustrations" of the atonement from the details of the sacred narrative. Again, Campbell's understanding of Christian experience led to his theory of the atonement. In the beginning of his ministry, maybe, he was convinced that he was simply expositing the Bible. Now he sees clearly that he works by analysis of the Christian experience and consciousness, particularly what is required for transformation, then turns to the Bible for illustration of what he has determined to be the case. It is possible that such an approach is entirely legitimate. It exemplifies what his son, Donald, identified as the main thesis of the book, that it was not the physical or even the penal character of Christ's sufferings that made them valuable for atonement but their moral and spiritual character of obedience and love. What Campbell finds in his analysis and in the Bible is that the atonement satisfies God not as a Judge but as the Father of all our spirits. But such an approach to the Bible runs the risk of seeming to find things that are not there or failing to see things that are there.

Two things remain to be said to complete our explication of Campbell's theory of the atonement. The first, which has been mentioned already but cannot be stressed enough, is that Campbell sees in God a loving Father, not a meticulous and calculating Judge.

The great root-distinction of the view of the atonement presented in these pages is the relation in which our redemption is regarded as standing to the fatherliness of God. In that fatherliness has the atonement been now represented as originating. By that fatherliness has its end been represented to have been determined. To that fatherliness has the demand for the elements of expiation found in it been traced. But the distinction is broad and unmistakeable between simple mercy proposing to save from evils and bestow blessings, and finding it necessary

to deal with justice as presenting obstacles to the realisation of its gracious designs,—which conception is that on which the other view of the atonement proceeds; and this of the love of the Father of our spirits going forth after us, His alienated children, lost to Him, dead to Him through sin, and desiring to be able to say of each one of us, “My son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found.”<sup>176</sup>

Thus the atonement is not an act of Christ to create in God love for us. Quite the opposite, it is an expression of God’s prior love for us. By the same token, the atonement does not create something in us which is entirely without precedent but instead awakens us to a tragically obscured reality.

In assuming, as I have been doing, a relation of men to God as the Father of spirits, antecedent to, and to be regarded as underlying their relation to Him as their moral governor, I have, in like manner, been calculating on a response from the depths of humanity. And it is in the hope of awakening that response into a distinct *consciousness* that I have proceeded in treating our *relationship to God as the Father of our spirits, as the ultimate truth*, in the light of which we are to see the scheme of our redemption, the Father’s sending the Son to be the Saviour of the world. If we are in very truth God’s offspring, if it is as the Father of our Spirits that He regards us while yet in our sins, it accords with this that the Father should send the Son to save us, that the Son should propose to save us by the revelation of the Father, and that our *salvation shall be participation in the life of sonship*.<sup>177</sup>

Moreover, it is important to remember that this desired consciousness is not something we initiate but is that which God gives to us through Christ’s work of atonement.

In thus receiving and obeying the testimony of the Father to the Son, and, in consequence, knowing the Father as the Son knows Him, and gives us to know Him in the deepest manner of experience of that work—“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him and He will shew them His covenant.”

But let us be clear as to the elements of our consciousness when this is our conscious history. We have not by any movement of our own being caused this drawing of the Father; we have only yielded to it;—neither have we by any movement of our being brought the Son thus near to us. He was thus near to us even when we knew it not. Only

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., pp. 296–297, emphasis added.

under the teaching of God we have Christ revealed in us the hope of glory.<sup>178</sup>

The second thing to be noted, a consequence of understanding God as the Father of our spirits, is that we are all brothers and sisters. Again, this is nothing new in the history of Christian thought. But it is important to realize that for Campbell one of the important consequences of the atonement is that we are brought into a consciousness of our relatedness to each other. In fact, it is not merely important but essential, inseparable from our consciousness of being children of God. We cannot have either one without the other. Here Campbell moves beyond the use of familial imagery to the use of strong and explicit language. In so doing, he entirely precludes what has been a dangerous temptation to some Christians who have thought that their faith could be merely an individual relationship to God while disregarding those about them.

What affects the conception we form of the sonship towards God to which the gospel calls us, must in a corresponding way affect our conception of that consciousness of brotherhood with man to which we are also called. The light of truth in which I see God as my Father is the light in which I see men as my brethren. . . .

. . . But the life of love which we have in Christ, which is sonship towards God, is, in being so, brotherhood towards men; and as it is in being sonship that it fulfills the first commandment, so it is in being brotherhood that it fulfills the second commandment. Therefore, as it is true that until we know God as our Father we cannot love Him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; so is it also true that until we know men as our brethren we cannot love our neighbors as ourselves.<sup>179</sup>

We have seen that Christ's work of the atonement was offered "entirely with the prospective purpose that it is to be reproduced in us." When this is done, what was called "the atonement" in Christ is known as "salvation" in us, and this salvation necessarily relates us to both God and each other.

In contemplating the eternal life in Christ as taking the form of the atonement, the outcoming of love has been seen to be one and the same thing as sonship towards God and brotherhood towards man; and all that has been presented to our faith as entering into the work of Christ has appeared to have been equally called for by love to God and by love to man,—a *self-sacrifice* which was at once *devotedness to God* and *devotedness*

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 315.



to man. The eternal life being unchanging in its nature, it follows, as urged above, that what it was in Christ as an atonement, it will be in us as salvation. Therefore Christ, as the Lord of our spirits and our love, *devotes us to God*, and *devotes us to men*, in the *fellowship of His self-sacrifice*.<sup>180</sup>

Many today prize independence and individuality, boasting in what they call a "personal" relationship to Jesus Christ when what they mean is a "private" relationship. For Campbell, such an idea is preposterous. Solitariness is not to be sought but escaped. Solitariness is the result of sin, which leaves us not only Fatherless but also brotherless and sisterless. Our salvation is our rich consciousness of being not only children of God but brothers and sisters to each other, and these are inseparable. Campbell goes over this repeatedly, in stronger and stronger language, finally reaching this emphatic conclusion:

*If we refuse to be in Christ the brothers of men, we cannot be in Christ the sons of God.* This is in another form of words our Lord's teaching, when He says, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses." We must die to self in the fellowship of the death of Christ, if we would live to God; and, so dying as to live to God, we shall live to each other also.<sup>181</sup>

Campbell's explication of the nature of the atonement through his analysis of the Christian experience of being conscious of being children of God and his depiction of Christ's work in the atonement as providing that which is morally and spiritually necessary to generate such a consciousness lead to some very practical implications about brotherly and sisterly love.

Campbell's theory was not beyond misunderstanding. It was quickly criticized as a notion of "vicarious repentance," a moral fiction no better than the legal fiction of "vicarious satisfaction" which it sought to replace.<sup>182</sup> Part of this misunderstanding grows from an unfortunate choice of words. In what was undoubtedly an effort to retain some connection with his Protestant and Reformed theological heritage, Campbell built part of his theory on a suggestion made, though undeveloped, by Jonathan Edwards, that "an equivalent sorrow or repentance" would be as sufficient for atonement as the traditionally

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 318.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 341, quoting [James Martineau], "Mediatorial Religion," *National Review* 2 (April 1856):495; republished in James Martineau, *Studies of Christianity: or, Timely Thoughts for Religious Thinkers*, ed. William R. Alger (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1875), pp. 147-176.

understood "equivalent punishment."<sup>183</sup> If this stood alone, the criticism would hold. But it does not stand alone. The words must be understood within the larger context of the entire theory. In particular, the greater part of this misunderstanding flows from an undue concentration upon the "retrospective" and "Godward" second-fourth of the theory and the concomitant failure to appreciate or comprehend the theory as a whole.<sup>184</sup> Indeed, the criticisms sound similar to those leveled at him at Row, his first pastorate. There he was told that his teaching of universal atonement removed all motivation for personal holiness, when in fact he sought by that teaching to open the way for previously unresponsive people to respond in confidence, joy, and holiness. Similarly, the notion of "vicarious repentance" sounds as if Campbell thought the work of Christ were of such a nature to warrant no response. But quite the opposite! Although Campbell thought that the work of Christ was perfect and ours would never approach it, nevertheless he clearly stated that the entire purpose of the whole atoning work of Christ was that it be reproduced in us. As Christ concurred with God's condemnation of sin, so are we to come to concur, without complaint; as Christ in this humanward concurrence simultaneously made a Godward confession, so are we to confess sin, without attempt at self-justification; as Christ bore witness to our true status as children of God, so are we to enter into the consciousness of this status, gratefully; and as Christ intercedes to God on our behalf, so are we, rejoicing in the gift of eternal life, to enter into prayerful communion with God. What was the work of atonement in Christ becomes the gift of salvation in us. As Christ was God's Son and our Elder Brother, so are we drawn into the consciousness of being children of God and brothers and sisters to each other.

Again, it can be seen that the entire theory of the atonement has been con-

<sup>183</sup> *Atonement*, p. 118. Thomas Erskine, in a letter to Campbell, offers a more optimistic evaluation of this borrowing: "You have been most happy in finding, in such a universally recognised Calvinistic authority as Edwards, the basis of your great argument. This will give your book an advantage which it could not have had by any mere address to reason and conscience" (Hanna, *Erskine*, 2:104). Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ in Its Physical, Ethical, and Official Aspects*, 2d ed., rev. and enl. (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1881), pp. 319-320, 442, and 3d ed., rev. and enl. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1889), pp. 317, 438-439, suggests that Edwards might have gotten the idea from a schoolman of the twelfth century, Rupert of Duytz, *Commentarium in Joannem*, lib. ii. 107 (Rupert Titiensis, *Opera*, vol. iii, p. 244, Migne's edition).

<sup>184</sup> Later, Campbell regretted that many sympathizers had taken up only what he said about the prospective aspect of the atonement and had dropped the retrospective aspect; thus *Memoirs*, 2:344-345. Clearly, both aspects are essential to a true understanding of Campbell's theory of the atonement.

ceived to depict the atonement as that which is spiritually and morally necessary to generate the experience and consciousness of being children of God. It is the failure to serve this purpose which disqualifies other theories. And it is the guiding light of this purpose which governs Campbell's own understanding of the life and death of Jesus Christ and his reading of the Scriptures. Thus, while he appeals to the Scripture as a norm and relates everything in his theory to the gospel story of Jesus Christ in a way that the penal theories do not, he reads the story from the perspective of his concept of Christian experience. Campbell, from his understanding of the consciousness of being a child of God and of being such because of the work of God in Christ, imposes upon the Scriptures a unified depiction of Christ as the perfect son and perfect elder brother, the unity of which depiction is not supported by the Scriptures themselves. A weakness of Campbell's theology lies in his handling of the very Scriptures to which he so eloquently and ardently appeals, both in this book and at his trial; the strength of this theology, perhaps sufficient to be untouched by biblical criticism, is surely in the profundity of his analysis of Christian experience.

### CONCLUSION

With the publication of *The Nature of the Atonement* in 1856, Campbell's twenty-five long years of obscurity came to an end. The minister who had been deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland in 1831 now deservedly achieved a level of public prominence as a capable, innovative, and important theologian. His remarkable reworking of the heritage of Protestant and Reformed theology, particularly of the atonement, might lead one to think that he was a Reformer himself. Yet this would not be entirely accurate. Certainly he revised the tradition that he received, and such revision is a part of the nature of that particular tradition. But these were theological revisions, not ecclesiastical reforms. He worked outside the various churches and did not reform any of them. It is to his credit that he refused to start or join a sect. Campbell was neither a churchman nor a reformer in terms of involvement with an organized church or denomination.

Campbell is best understood as a preacher, pastor, and theologian. His theology grew out of his preaching and intended to address the pastoral and theological concerns of the day. In this way he affected the life and thought of the churches, of theologians, and of countless Christians who heard or read his work. Through it all, he continued to follow the guiding light of his understanding of Christian experience.

Campbell's conclusion to his book serves well here:

The reader who has accompanied me to the close of this volume, in the fair mind and with the patience of love, has I trust felt that throughout I have simply sought to awaken a response in his own inner being,—whether in this I have succeeded or have not,—and that I have written, not with the interest of theological controversy, but as a man communing with his brother man, and giving utterance to the deep convictions of his own heart as to the spiritual need of humanity, and the common salvation. For I have written as seeming to myself to hear, and as desiring to be used to help others to hear with personal and practical application, the Son of God saying to us, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me,” the Father saying to us, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.”<sup>185</sup>

<sup>185</sup> *Atonement*, p. 329.





## Annotated Bibliography

### *Primary Sources, Including Works by John McLeod Campbell and the Documents of his Heresy Trial (listed chronologically)*

*Libel and Answers in the Case of John McLeod Campbell, Minister of Row.* Glasgow: E. Khull and Son, 1830.

Campbell submitted 181 handwritten pages of answers to the Presbytery. They recommended that he have them printed and furnish them with copies.

*Answers to the Libel Given in Against Him, to the Rev. Presbytery of Dumbarton.* Greenock: R. B. Lusk; Glasgow: M. Ogle, W. Collins, and G. Gallie; Belfast: W. M. M'Comb; Dublin: R. M. Tims; Edinburgh: J. Lindsay, and Co.; London: J. Nisbet, 1831.

This consists primarily of the Libel, pp. 3–9, and the Answers, pp. 10–68, then continues with extracts from the Presbytery minutes for 21 and 22 September, 5 October, and 7 December 1830, with protests by Campbell and R. H. Story, pp. 69–103. It is included in *The Whole Proceedings Before the Presbytery of Dumbarton, and the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr*, . . . , q.v. below.

*A Letter Written as a Word in Season to His People.* Greenock: R. B. Lusk; Glasgow: W. Collins, M. Ogle, and G. Gallie; Edinburgh: J. Lindsay and Co.; London: J. Nisbet, 1831.

The first page indicates that Campbell wrote this from Kilninver, “To the Parishioners of Row,” on 24 December 1830.

*Proof for the Prosecution in the Case of John McLeod Campbell, Minister of Row.* Glasgow: Edward Khull, Printer, 1831.

The title is a misnomer. Only the first third, pp. 1–55, consists of the depositions for the prosecution. The remainder, pp. 55–163, consists of the depositions for the defender. These witnesses, through the second for the defense, pp. 1–84, were heard on 15–18 February 1831. The rest were heard from 1 March until early in the morning of 4 March 1831. Campbell wrote that he could have built his case out of the prosecution's witnesses' depositions, and that he could have substituted the answers of his second witness, James Whitshed Hawkins, pp. 68–84, for his own (*Memorials*, 1:75). Each page of this

item is divided into seven sections, lettered in the margin, apparently for ease of reference in the church courts. It is included in the second major section of *The Whole Proceedings Before the Presbytery . . . and Synod . . .*, q.v. below.

*Speech Delivered at the Bar of the . . . Synod of Glasgow and Ayr . . . on . . . 13th April, 1831.*

This speech is also included in the second major sections of *The Whole Proceedings Before the Presbytery . . . and Synod . . .*, q.v. below, pp. 174–233.

*The Whole Proceedings Before the Presbytery of Dumbarton, and Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, in the Case of the Rev. John M'Leod Campbell, Minister of Row. Including the Libel, Answers to the Libel, Evidence, and Speeches.* Greenock: R. B. Lusk; Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, and J. Lindsay and Co.; Belfast: W. M'Comb; Dublin: R. M. Tims; London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., and J. Nisbet, 1831.

This composite volume begins with an introduction, "Proceedings in the Case of the Rev. John M'Leod Campbell," Greenock, 14th May, 1831, pp. iii–xxxvi, giving facts leading up to the trial, before it became a matter of record, along with accounts from shorthand notes of some of the early Presbytery meetings regarding this case. The first major sections continues with the *Answers to the Libel* . . . , q.v. above, pp. 1–103. The second major section, with new pagination, begins with the *Proof for the Prosecution* . . . , q.v. above, pp. 1–163, continues with the actions of the Presbytery on 29 March 1831 and protests against it, pp. 165–170, and gives the proceedings of the Synod on 13 and 14 April 1831, pp. 170–349, including Campbell's *Speech Delivered at the Bar* . . . , q.v. above. It concludes with an abridged account of the Presbytery meeting of 29 March 1831, the shorthand writer's notes of this meeting not having arrived in time for its inclusion in the proper place; this "Appendix" covers pp. 351–371. This entire volume is included in a larger volume, *The Whole Proceedings . . . before the Presbytery . . . the Synod . . . and the General Assembly* . . . , q.v. below.

*A Full Report of the Proceedings in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in the Case of the Rev. John M'Leod Campbell, Late Minister of Row, on the 24th and 25th of May, 1831.* Taken in shorthand. Greenock: R. B. Lusk; Edinburgh: J. Lindsay and Co., and Waugh and Innes; Belfast: Wm. M'Comb; Dublin: R. M. Tims; London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., and J. Nisbet, 1831; 2d ed., 1831; 3d ed., 1831.

This item, with its own pagination, pp. 1–194, is included as the third and final major section in *The Whole Proceedings . . . before the Presbytery . . . the Synod . . . and the General Assembly* . . . , q.v. below.

*The Whole Proceedings in the Case of the Rev. John M'Leod Campbell, Late Minister of Row, Before the Presbytery of Dumbarton, the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland; Including, Besides All the Documents, the Speeches in the Different Church Courts.* Taken in shorthand. Greenock: R. B. Lusk; Edinburgh: J. Lindsay and Co., and Waugh and Innes; Belfast: Wm.

M'Comb; Dublin: R. M. Tims; London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co. and J. Nisbet, 1831.

This final volume of Campbell's trial material includes *The Whole Proceedings Before the Presbytery . . . and Synod . . .*, q.v. above, pp. i-xxxvi, 1-103, and 1-371, and *A Full Report . . . in the General Assembly*, q.v. above, pp. 1-194, thus running to a total length of 704 pages. References to this work identify part 1, 2, or 3, then give the page number within that part. It was compiled by the publisher, R[obert] B[aillic] Lusk (*Proceedings*, 1:8, *Memorials*, 1:336, n. 1).

*Notes of Sermons*. 3 vols. Taken in shorthand. Paisley: John Vallance, vols. 1 and 2, 1831, vol. 3, 1832.

Lithographed from manuscript. Printed only for the subscribers. Different from tracts by the same name and from another volume by the same name. These consist mainly of numbered sermons, with a few unnumbered items, each paginated separately.

*Sermons and Lectures*. Taken in shorthand. Vol. 1, 3d ed., vol. 2, 1st ed. Greenock: R. B. Lusk; Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, and J. Lindsay and Co.; Belfast: W. M'Comb; Dublin: R. M. Tims; London: J. Nisbet, and Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1832.

The first edition of the first volume was published as *Notes of Sermons*, different from the three-volume collection by the same title listed above.

*Fragments of Expositions of Scripture*. London: J. Wright and Co., Aldine Chambers; Hamilton, Adams and Co., Paternoster-Row; and J. Nisbet and Co., Berners-Street, 1843; *Fragments of Truth: Being the Exposition of Several Passages of Scripture*. 3d ed. Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1861; *Fragments of Truth: Being the Expositions of Passages of Scripture Chiefly from the Teaching of John M'Leod Campbell, D.D.* 4th ed., with Preface by his Son. Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1898.

The first three editions were published anonymously. A. J. Scott wrote two of the pieces, as did Thomas Erskine. Outside the "Preface to the Third Edition," no mention of the second edition is to be found; perhaps it was a reprint of the first. The Third edition is much revised and enlarged, omitting nine of the original thirteen selections, increasing the total to thirty. The fourth edition is a reprint of the third, with the exception of a new title page and the addition of the "Prefatory Note to Fourth Edition." Campbell's sermons are from the time between the end of his ministry in row (1831) and the writing of his books (certainly no later than 1856 and perhaps as early as 1851).

*Christ the Bread of Life: An Attempt to Give a Profitable Direction to the Present Occupation of Thought with Romanism*. Glasgow: Maurice Ogle and Son; Edinburgh: Robert Ogle; London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1851; 2d ed., London: Macmillan and Co., 1869.

Originally part of a course of teaching from Ps. 23. Second edition is greatly enlarged.



*The Nature of the Atonement and Its Relation to Remission of Sins and Eternal Life.* Cambridge, England: Macmillan, 1856; 2d ed., with an Introduction and Notes. London: Macmillan and Co., 1867; Introduction and Notes to 2d ed. issued as a separate publication in 1868; 3d ed., with analytical Table of Contents, 1869; 4th ed., in smaller type, 1873; 5th ed., 1878; 6th ed., London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1886, reprinted 1895; 4th ed., with a new Introduction by Edgar P. Dickie. London: James Clarke and Co., Ltd., 1959; with a new Introduction by James B. Torrance. Edinburgh: The Handsel Press Ltd., Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996.

This is Campbell's greatest and best known work. It assumes his earlier stance on the universal extent of the atonement and moves to consider its nature. Campbell began intense study for it in 1853 and finished writing it in September 1855. The chapter divisions were made after the text was complete. Though it was first published in 1856, some sources set it in 1855, or even as early as 1854. Similarly, some place the third edition in 1868 and the fourth edition in 1872. Throughout the later editions, the only major revisions were the additions to the second edition. The pagination of the second edition is identical to that of the third. The fourth edition has significantly fewer pages. The fifth and sixth editions are identical to each other and are only three pages longer than the fourth. I have used the 1895 reprint of the sixth edition. The 1959 edition wrongly claims to be the fourth (Tuttle, p. 9, q.v. below, attributes this to "an unfortunate clerical error," but does not give the source of this information). It does not even reproduce the actual fourth edition, but instead it follows the pagination of the second and third editions for the main body of the text, though not for the separately paginated (in roman numerals) introductions. Moreover, the page references in Dickie's introduction do not follow the second, third, fourth, or his own edition, but instead correspond to the pagination of the fifth and sixth editions. The Handsel and Eerdmans reprint of 1996 introduces a whole new pagination, as well as "grammatical updating" and "break[ing] up some of the dense paragraphs" (p. x). It is curious that these publishers have chosen to refer to Campbell as only J. McLeod Campbell, and that James B. Torrance repeatedly refers to him as only McLeod Campbell. Though this is widespread in the secondary literature, Campbell, so far as I can tell, normally used his full name, particularly in his publications. In fact, Campbell writes of a time that the Bishop of Argyll left off his first name, and he calls that "a mistake" (*Memorials*, 2:183–185).

*Thoughts on Revelation, With Special Reference to the Present Time.* Cambridge, England: Macmillan, 1862; 2d ed., with table of Contents and concluding bibliographical Note. London: Macmillan and Co.; Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1874.

The headings and subheadings in Part 2 of the second edition are slightly different from the first; otherwise, the text appears to be the same.

*Reminiscences and Reflections, Referring to His Early Ministry in the Parish of Row, 1825-31.* Edited, with an Introductory Narrative, by his son, Donald Campbell. London: Macmillan and Co., 1873; reprint, Louisville, Kentucky: Lost Cause Press, Microfiche Nos. 24, 646-650, 1977.

The Introductory Narrative, a biography based in part on Campbell's letter of 1 January 1831 to his brother in India, is particularly important. In this last volume Campbell wrote, he brings a lifetime of theological reflection to bear upon his early experiences at Row. The work remains incomplete, and Donald indicates that the order in which he presents the fragments is neither that in which his father wrote them nor necessarily that which his father intended.

*Responsibility for the Gift of Eternal Life: Compiled by Permission of the Late Rev. John McLeod Campbell, D.D., from Sermons Preached Chiefly at Row, in the Years 1829-31.* London: Macmillan and Co., 1873.

Some secondary literature realizes that these sermons have been greatly changed and additionally suggests that Campbell himself altered these to bring them into line with his later thought. But the Preface clearly states that it was the compiler who changed the original form and order of Campbell's thoughts, making many omissions, rearrangements, and verbal changes. Campbell saw only the Title Page before his death, and even of that the compiler records that Campbell wrote that he remembered emphasizing "the attractions felt in the *Grace seen in itself*" more than "the relation of the Gospel to a future Judgment," which was only "an element" in his teaching. For these reasons, I consider the volume a most unreliable source. The reader must be referred to *Sermons and Lectures*, q.v. above, from which these selections were drawn, for a more accurate expression of Campbell's thought.

*Memorials of John McLeod Campbell, D.D., Being Selections from His Correspondence.* Edited by his son, Donald Campbell. 2 vols. London: Macmillan and Co., 1877; reprint ed., Louisville, Kentucky: Lost Cause Press, Microfiche A40, 559-563 (vol. 1) and A40, 564-567 (vol. 2), 1976.

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